

Nonprofits And New Media: How Do NPOs And Their Employees Adopt And Use New  
Media To Communicate With And Influence Their Community?

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By  
Lauren Bacon Brengarth  
Elizabeth Behm-Morawitz, Ph.D., Dissertation Supervisor

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The undersigned, appointed by the dean of the Graduate School, have examined the dissertation entitled

NONPROFITS AND NEW MEDIA:

HOW DO NPOS AND THEIR EMPLOYEES ADOPT AND USE NEW MEDIA TO COMMUNICATE WITH AND INFLUENCE THEIR COMMUNITY?

presented by Lauren Bacon Brengarth,

a candidate for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

and hereby certify that, in their opinion, it is worthy of acceptance.

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Dr. Elizabeth Behm-Morawitz, Advisor

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Dr. Jennifer Stevens Aubrey

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Dr. Rebecca Meisenbach

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Dr. Michael Porter

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Dr. Lee Wilkins

## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the two loves of my life:

My husband, Rhett and my son, Brady

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## ABSTRACT

This study looks at how new media technologies are adopted by nonprofit organizations (NPOs) and their employees. Using qualitative interviews, the study explores how new media are incorporated into NPO work and how such adoption allows the organizations and their staff to have greater influence on their community by serving an agenda setting function in society. Overall, participants in this study find that there are many positive outcomes of new media adoption, such as increased efficiencies, a greater connection with the NPO community, and the ability to see immediate results from using new media for activities such as posting to social networking sites. Participants also mentioned the downsides of new media adoption that include a faster pace of work, the expectation to be available 24/7, and increased sloppy work. The majority of participants see new media as tools that enable NPOs to serve a news producing function in society.

The findings of this study present both theoretical and practical implications. The practical implications include insight into how new media adoption is successful for NPOs. NPOs that are strategic in having specific staff members oversee and implement new media uses find the greatest success. The theoretical implications impact both diffusion of innovations theory and agenda setting theory. The study looks at adoption practices of new media and marks how these practices are currently unfolding in a time of rapid new media adoption activity within NPOs. This study also suggests a new way of interpreting agenda setting theory to include all news producers (such as nonprofits that produce mediated messages through new media) as we apply the theory in scholarly study.



## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

“When we change the way we communicate, we change society” (Shirky, 2008, p. 17).

Society is changing all around us at a pace that seems to increase with the invention and adoption of each new communication technology. We have seen society change with new communication practices introduced by technologies such as the telegraph, telephone, radio, television, computerized technologies, and the Internet. This study is focused on digital technologies that are referred to broadly as new media. While new media have changed communication practices for many organizations and individuals, the focus of this study is how nonprofits have adopted new media and how they are changing the work experience of the NPO employee and the NPO’s influence on and interaction with its community.

New media enable NPOs (which often work on limited budgets) to connect with their communities in new and meaningful ways. It is of particular interest and importance to study new media use by nonprofits because of the NPO structure, which is quite different from that of a for-profit organization. Unlike for-profit organizations, NPOs are organizations that do not distribute profits and must serve some sort of public good. This study gives insight into how new media help NPO professionals and the organizations in which they work to accomplish their goals and influence society. This insight provides practical implications for the nonprofit sector and scholarly implications for academics in the fields of mass communication and nonprofit studies.

To situate the topic of new media with the current study, first I will briefly define what is meant by the term “new media” (in chapter two, I further will explain their history and relevance to this study in greater detail). New media refers to means of communicating in the digital world (McQuail, 2005). In a digital format, all texts can be reduced to a binary code that can be produced, distributed and stored using the same process. We see this format in digital technologies such as CD-ROM, DVD, digital television, computers, wireless devices, and the Internet (Pavlik, 2001; PC Mag, 2010; McQuail, 2005). New media allow groups of people to communicate online to share, sell, and swap goods. New media also enable people to share information and to have a voice in their community through online forums accessible via computer or mobile “smart” devices. The term *new* implies something that is *old* as well. Old or traditional media are those means of communicating prior to the digital world including radio, TV, and printed materials such as books and magazines (McQuail, 2005). The goal of this dissertation is to focus specifically on how new media are adopted by the NPOs and their employees, and in so doing, how does such adoption influence the interaction between the NPO, its employees, and the NPO’s community?

In order to execute the focus of this study, I have conducted qualitative research using case study methodology. Literature on new media, nonprofit organizations, the diffusion of innovations theory (Rogers, 1995) and agenda setting theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972) serve as guideposts for understanding the underpinning processes that are involved with new media use and acquisition.

The theoretical guidance of diffusion of innovations and agenda setting help explain the ways in which media play a role in influencing society’s adoption of new

technologies and how new media use influences how individuals assign importance to specific societal issues. To expand upon these theories, I use them as a starting point to dive into understanding how the processes of diffusion and agenda setting influence individual life experiences for nonprofit professionals and organizational interactions that the nonprofits have with their communities. For example, diffusion of innovations explains the process that takes place in order for adoption to occur, but it does not tell us what happens to individual lived experience once the new technology is adopted. Likewise, agenda setting helps explain the process of media influence on issue salience in society, but it does not generally include media producers outside of traditional media (such as TV, newspapers, magazines, etc.). There is a lack of agenda setting studies that focus on organizational media producers (such as NPOs) for study of influence on issue salience. The traditional agenda setting perspective also does not help to explain how individual nonprofit workers view their organization's influence on the community. This is an important understanding to grasp since NPOs and the individuals who work within them transmit mediated messages to large groups of people. These messages have the potential to influence issue salience within society, much like the messages disseminated by mainstream mass media outlets.

To gain a deeper understanding of how new media influence NPO professionals, this study involves speaking with NPO professionals to get their personal accounts of how new media are used in their work, have become incorporated into and affected their work, and how such media influence the NPO's interaction with its community. I define the NPO community as the realm in which it aims to have influence and key individuals who assist in making influence possible (donors, volunteers, champions of the cause,

etc.). For some nonprofits, the realm of influence is very specific (such as hungry children in a Chicago school district). For other nonprofits, it may be more broad and universal in scope (to develop a universal cure for cancer).

This dissertation uses a case study approach for data collection and analysis. In-depth interviews allowed me to collect highly detailed data about the individual experiences that NPO professionals go through with the adoption of new media in their workplace. I investigated the ways in which adoption of new media influences the NPO workers' work life as well as how new media influence the NPO's interaction with its community. In-depth interviews provide the opportunity to hear personal testimony that can lead to findings that generalizable data cannot capture. The case study method allowed me to analyze the data to identify themes and patterns that emerged within each case and among the cases overall. Rather than establishing a wide-scale view of how new media impact NPO professionals and the NP organization, the goal of this study is to obtain a deep understanding of the detailed ways in which new media influence the work of participants interviewed and the NPOs in which they work. The graphic detail in the data of this study present a unique contribution to the scholarly understanding of new media and how it plays a role NPO professionals' work experience and their ability to influence their community.

## CHAPTER TWO

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of chapter two is to situate the current study within existing research. This chapter discusses relevant works published by previous scholars in order to understand more about new media, nonprofits, diffusion of innovations and agenda setting and how these works relate to the current study. First, the chapter explores new media, their defining features, and how they relate to this study. Next, the chapter examines the characteristics of the nonprofit organization (NPO) and the ways in which some NPOs use new media for its major activities of fundraising, advocacy and activism, and volunteerism (Fine, 2006). The chapter then explores two theoretical models that help to inform the study: diffusion of innovations and agenda setting. Diffusion of innovations has been used to understand new technologies and the communicative process that influences adoption in a community. This process is important to help us understand how new media arrive within the work of NPO professionals and diffuse through the NPO. Agenda setting theory is discussed using the traditional theory (which addresses traditional media's effects on issue salience in society) and expanding the theory in application to new media uses by NPOs (and how this may present new opportunities for NPOs to influence their publics).

Diffusion of innovations and agenda setting provide models of understanding from which I have built upon to present the current case study that addresses the question: How do NPOs and their employees adopt and use new media to communicate with and influence their community?

## New media: Changing society and the nonprofit sector

The history of digital new media extends back to 1969 (Shedden, 2010). David Shedden at the Poynter Institute compiled a timeline of new media activity from its earliest stages that utilized four ARPANET computers operated by the U.S. government to test an experimental network. New media have literally transformed mass communication and interpersonal communication alike. Major news organizations no longer are the sole producer of breaking news. Individuals today with cell phones can capture newsworthy or historic images and post these to social networks that can spread the images to a mass audience (a term often referred to as going “viral”). These new technologies allow individuals and organizations to circumvent the traditional major news outlets when disseminating messages. Messages can be shared globally online without relying upon these organizations to do it. New media provide the opportunity for bypassing the mainstream media’s gatekeeping role it holds in society.

Along with the rapid changes in technology have come significant changes in communication practices and how they impact the workplace. Just two decades ago, cell phones were scarcely utilized and email was just beginning to enter households and businesses. The cell phones that *were* used in 1991 were large block-like objects that took up an entire purse to tote and email was a cumbersome process at best. Today’s cell phones are one of several new media offerings. They now are joined by iPods, Bluetooth earpieces, jump drives, and numerous other pocket-sized gadgets that can fit in one’s pocket. Email is a dominant tool for communication, both personally and professionally. According to Internet usage statistics, in 2010 77.4% of people in North America use the Internet (Internet World Stats, 2010). New media continue to get smaller in size, but they

are larger in the ways in which they influence communication among friends, family, colleagues, businesses, governments, and global networks. New media have opened opportunities for individuals and organizations to speak to large networks that previously were inaccessible.

Many scholars have researched the influence of new media on communication. Slevin (2000) argues that it opens up a way for new and diverse vicarious relationships and networks that sometimes are more connected than traditional networks. We see examples of this through social networking through forums like Facebook, online dating sites, and niche-driven blogs that stir interaction online among people who would otherwise be strangers to one another. Some of the topics that have drawn the greatest scholarly attention include virtual communities, or online communities of people with similar interests (Lindlof & Schatzer, 1997; Rheingold, 2002; Slevin, 2000; Turner, 1998); politics (Coleman, 1999; Dahlberg, 2001); freedoms granted by new media (such as the freedom to publish information without having to use traditional media channels) (Castells, 2001; Hamelink, 2000); controls of new media (especially controls that exist with new media use in countries outside of the U.S.) (Chalaby, 2001); and the equity and divisions that have occurred as new media are adopted (McChesney, 2000; Van Zoonen, 2002). Zorn et al. (2011) discuss how these new technologies are adopted in the nonprofit setting. They found that institutional influences play a role in adoption practices. Those that NPOs adopting and using new media saw themselves as leaders (or emulated NPO leaders and they had internal staff leaders who had the expertise to enable adoption and use of such technology. Because new media have become so pervasive in much of the world, scholarship is reflecting the drastic changes of communication and process that are

taking place in the modern digital society.

As noted in the definition, new media have made it easier for groups to assemble (McQuail, 2005; Slevin, 2000). Former limits of size, scope, and sophistication of nonprofit grass roots efforts are quite different than they were in the recent past (Shirky, 2008). Although traditional forms of media management continue to exist (e.g., in mainstream TV news, ABC, NBC, and CBS are still dominant forces), today's new media present competition to traditional institutional forms for creating news content and disseminating messages. While corporations and governments will not disappear, their relative advantages have in many cases been challenged (Shirky, 2008). For example, the music industry once was the sole producer of music for personal use. Now people can digitally reproduce music with little effort and share reproduced files with others. People no longer turn exclusively to traditional media buying practices to obtain music they want to hear. New media have opened the door for ordinary individuals and organizations to produce content that in the recent past could only be produced and shared by a few key organizations. This study aims to learn more about how new media opportunities are incorporated into the work experience of nonprofit individuals and the communication practices of NPOs themselves. This study listens to the voices of individual NPO employees to understand how new media have influenced their personal work experience and the voice that they and their organizations have within their community.

NPOs are among the many taking advantage of the opportunities that new media provide. New media enable nonprofits to lower the cost of coordinating group action and delivering key messages to the public (Salamon, 2003). Many NPO success stories that are not picked up by mainstream media can now be shared with the public through web



content, email, and social networking. For example, at Pikes Peak United Way, a group of women volunteered to work with low-income families and children to encourage literacy in the home ([www.ppunitedway.org](http://www.ppunitedway.org)). They hosted a family literacy night at a daycare for at-risk families. While this story was not compelling enough for traditional media outlets, the organization was able to produce and share the story itself. The next day, an email full of heart-warming photos was distributed to the organization's stakeholders. As a result, several more people emerged to volunteer for the effort.

Financially affordable new media opportunities have arrived at a good time, as today's American nonprofit organization faces mounting economic challenges with the current historic downturn in the U.S. economy. According to the 2009 Philanthropic Giving Index (PGI) produced by the Center of Philanthropy at Indiana University (CPIU), the 2009 assessment of the nonprofit giving environment was at its lowest level, 58 (on a scale from 1-100), since the center began the study in 1998 (The NonProfit Times, 2009). This scale is based on responses from nonprofit professionals and is similar to a "consumer confidence" scale (The NonProfit Times, 2009). The PSI has averaged a score of about 82 during the history of the study.

Even amidst a dismal economic landscape, the PGI also assesses which fundraising strategies produce the greatest success. Whereas many traditional fundraising strategies such as major gifts, planned giving, special events, foundation grants, telephone solicitations, and corporate gifts are at or near their lowest levels since the study began in 1998, the same is not the case for Internet and email fundraising and direct mail (The Non Profit Times, 2009). In these areas, philanthropists are still finding some fundraising success by seeing increased funds raised through online means. Una O. Osili,

Interim Director of Research at the IUCP, suggests this may be because they bring more immediate returns than other fundraising techniques. Internet and email are still two fairly new modes for philanthropy and fundraising, and they, along with other technologies, have dramatically changed operations for NPOs (and all organizations) in the past decade. Today, new media enable NPOs to reach its pool of constituents instantly real-time, mediated messages for their followers. For example, the Crohn's and Colitis Foundation of Canada's *Renovating for Research No Go Gala* raised over \$350,000 for the cause (Renovating for Research, 2007) through its Internet "gala". Oxfam America has also seen success on the web. The organization created an online fundraising strategy in which donors can make contributions that are representative of a particular object (such as a school desk, goat, or vegetable garden). This campaign has raised nearly \$500,000 to help save lives, overcome poverty, and fight for social justice locally and globally and is ongoing (OxFam America, 2010).

In the many ways that new media change how people socialize and do business in the United States, the past five to ten years have been ushered in significant changes for the nonprofit sector, including web-based fundraising and social networks that mobilize volunteers and activism (Fine, 2006; Frumkin, 2006; Salamon, 2003). There is ample information regarding the ways in which new media are spreading in society, changing how we do things, and creating lasting impacts on our world, (Coleman, 1999; Dahlberg, 2001; Lindlof & Schatzer, 1997; McCombs, 2005; Norris, 2000; Rheingold, 1994; Slevin, 2000). This dissertation adds to what we already know by revealing how new media play a role in the work experience of NPO professionals and the NPO organization's relationship with its community. This study is unique in applying

traditional media theories (diffusion of innovations and agenda setting) to NPOs and new media. By applying these theories in new ways, this study expands how the theories are currently used in mass communication practices. The study also highlights key ways in which NPOs and the employees within them interface with new media in their work. The next section of this chapter gives a more detailed look into NPOs, their defining characteristics, and how they relate to the current study.

### An Overview of Nonprofit Organizations

Nonprofit organizations serve countless functions in society. The size and scope of NPOs varies widely, and therefore it is difficult to broadly characterize a sector of society that represents a wide variety of interests and missions. Although NPOs vary in size, mission, and character, the organizations and their employees all share a few traits that are unique to this sector. Because of the unique characteristics of the NPO structure, the work experience for NPO employees is also different from those working in for-profit or governmental agencies. This section is a brief review of some of the key characteristics and facts about this the U.S. NPO sector and its employees.

As of 2009, there were 1,554,277 registered NPOs in the U.S. (Internal Revenue Service Exempt Organizations Business Master File, 2009). Nonprofit organizations are organizations that provide multiple services for the public good (such as helping cure a disease, cleaning streams, promoting healthy family planning practices, religious practice, etc.). The formal definition of a nonprofit is a private organization that does not distribute profits to people who control or support the organization (Salamon, 2003). The nonprofit sector is also referred to as the third sector or the voluntary sector. Nonprofit organizations are generally exempt from federal, state, and local taxes as long as they

serve a public purpose (such as the examples described). Often these organizations are designated by the 501c (3) tax code (those exempt from federal taxes) or the 501c (4) tax code (those that operate for religious, charitable, scientific, or educational purposes) under which they also qualify for such tax exemptions. Nonprofit services include fundraising and research to help cure major diseases, such as provided by the American Cancer Society and the American Diabetes Association. Other NPOs, such as ONE and UNICEF, raise money to end global poverty. Organizations such as a local teacher or labor union serve to protect the rights of union employees. These are just a few examples of the myriad of purposes that international, national, and local NPOs serve.

Although the purpose of NPOs may differ, they all share fundamental characteristics of U.S. nonprofits. Now that some basic traits of nonprofit organizations have been explained, the next section will discuss characteristics of NPO employees that differentiate them from others.

#### *Traits of NPO Professionals*

Just as we discussed the defining characteristics of the nonprofit organization, it is also important to note the unique characteristics of the professionals that work within the NPO, since both the organization and the individual are the focus of this study. Research suggests that NPO workers are more focused on the mission of the organization and place a high value on non-monetary compensation. They embrace an environment that is value-driven and as a result are often willing to accept lower pay (Cour, 2003; Mirvis, 1992; Mirvis & Hackett, 1983, Onlyx & Maclean, 1996). Employees in NPOs are often more educated than counterparts in for-profit organizations and adhere to a high level of professionalism that includes a need for autonomy, collegiality, and participation in

decision making strategy (Cour, 2003). NPOs are able to attract higher educated employees (often for less pay than for-profit counterparts) because of the non-cash benefits that NPO work provides. While NPO employees enjoy the benefit of working in a value-driven environment that often provides perks such as a flexible work schedule for and family-friendly work conditions, they also face several challenges. The next section discusses some of the challenges that face today's NPOs and their employees.

### *NPO Challenges*

Professionals working in U.S. NPOs today have faced an increasingly challenging operating environment over the past quarter decade (Hackler & Saxton, 2007). Competition with other NPOs for scarce donor resources is a significant challenge (Thronton, 2006). NPOs have struggled with decreased government funding and increased demand for services resulting from a national economic downturn (Hackler & Saxton, 2007). For example, a 2010 study by the Connecticut Association of Nonprofits revealed that 54% of respondents reported seeing consumers who never previously requested services. They also reported an 82% increase in service requests in general. This shows a dramatic increase in need for NPO services. This increase is largely attributed to the fiscal climate and was most notable in the health and human services realms. Amidst increased requests for services, one-third of respondents needed to cut funding to deal with increasing costs and decreasing funding. One-third of participants in the survey said they experienced a decrease of 10% or more in each of these funding sources: government, grants/contracts, investment income and corporate contracts.

In addition to increased demands for services, there are also increased demands on today's NPOs to demonstrate high professional standards, strong oversight, high

accountability, and higher quality services (Burt & Taylor, 2003). High profile NPO scandals and the demand for greater financial transparency through websites such as *Guidestar* ([www.guidestar.org](http://www.guidestar.org)) have increased these demands (Burt & Taylor, 2003). *Charitynavigator.org* is another website that rates charities based on the percentage of fund raised toward program costs. If a charity spends too much on promotion or administrative costs, it will not receive the highest (four-star) rating. The site also provides salary information about NPO employees. With increased watch over NPO money management, NPOs are working with fewer resources under more scrutiny and greater demands (Burt & Taylor, 2003).

Despite the challenges just described, NPOs have been resourceful, as third-sector organizations have proven themselves a dominant force in new media use. A study by Barnes and Mattson (2008) shows that NPOs are outpacing the business world and academia in their use of social media. Barnes and Mattson studied the 200 largest NPOs in the U.S., as listed annually by *Forbes Magazine*. The magazine's list is based on the amount of private, nongovernmental support a charity received in the latest available fiscal year. The list excludes academic institutions, nonprofits funded by a small number of donors (such as a private foundation), those that do not solicit funds, and religious organizations that do not report financial numbers. The researchers found that 89 percent of charitable organizations use some form of social media (including blogs, podcasts, message boards, social networking, video blogging and wikis). A majority (57 percent) of the NPOs blog (compared to only 27 percent of Inc. 500 corporations in the same time period). Forty-five percent of the NPOs studied report that social media is very important to their fundraising strategy. As NPOs adopt and implement new media technologies, the

use of these provide opportunities for innovation in their organizations and to help address many of the previously mentioned challenges they face (Berlinger & Te'eni, 1999; Burt & Taylor, 2000, 2003; Elliott et al., 1998; Hackler & Saxton, 2007). The following section explains some of the ways that new media are used in NPOs to accomplish major organizational tasks and overcome some of the challenges they face.

#### *New Media Use in NPO Activism, Volunteerism, and Fundraising*

Nonprofits generally have three major functions: activism, fundraising, and volunteer efforts (Fine, 2006). Fine says that we have moved from the information age to the connected age because of the social capabilities that new media enable. This is significant because new media not only enable the dissemination of information to large groups of people but they also enable significant social connections to begin or evolve through web-based communication. NPOs today are part of a bigger network of people, organizations, and information that demands a new approach to their three main functions (Fine, 2006). New media enable NPOs to reach more constituents in a greater number of ways in the areas of activism, volunteer efforts, and fundraising. This study aims to expand beyond what we already know and dig deeper into understanding how adoption of new media shape the working lives of NPO professionals and the interactions that NPOs have with their communities. The following section provides a review of current literature regarding new media and NPOs upon which this study builds.

#### *New Media Use in NPO Activism and Advocacy*

Since the turn of the century, growing scholarly attention has been drawn to examination of Internet activism and how new media have been used effectively in advocacy, activism, and social movements (Diani, 2000; FitzGerald & McNutt, 1997;

Kahn & Kellner, 2004; McNutt & Boland, 1999; Van Aelst & Walgrave, 2002).

Advocates for a cause lobby in support of the effort. Activists are those who rally for recognition of their cause or for change to take place. Social movements are changes caused by groups of people connected to one another communicatively to create change. In this growing body of research, many are intrigued by how new media networks impact the relevance or importance of traditional face-to-face networks. Prior to new media, community advocates relied exclusively upon face-to-face meetings to accomplish time-sensitive goals and further the mission of NPO causes. While face-to-face interaction still proves to be one of the most valuable ways to address social agendas (Diani, 2000), new media have broadened the scope and speed of advocacy capabilities. They continue to create intrigue about where they could take advocacy movements into the future.

Online advocacy (also known as electronic advocacy) is revolutionizing advocacy practices in the U.S. (McNutt & Boland, 1999). Electronic advocacy is defined as technological media used to influence stakeholders to effect policy change (FitzGerald & McNutt, 1997). Van Aelst and Walgrave (2002) conducted a study on the impacts that new media have on the international anti-globalization movement. They say that in order for something to be considered a social movement (a term which is interchangeable with advocacy or activism), specific elements have to be present: (1) a network of organizations, (2) on the basis of a shared collective identity, (3) mobilizing people to join in action, and (4) to obtain social or political goals. New media make it possible for each of these elements to exist outside of the face-to-face network, and they allow people around the world to engage in social activism to influence their communities and propel social movements.



Most nonprofits display some form of advocacy or call to action opportunity on their web pages. For example, the Mothers and More website ([www.mothersandmore.org](http://www.mothersandmore.org)) recruits members to join their cause to raise consciousness about existing cultural conditions that impact mothers and to secure economic and social equality for mothers. United Way Worldwide ([www.liveunited.org](http://www.liveunited.org)) encourages people to “champion the cause” in support of education, income, and health through reaching out to members of Congress and publicly raising their voices to advance the common good. People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals (PETA) encourages people use their website to recruit its action team members who promote animal rights at the grassroots level. These are just a few examples of nonprofits that use Internet-based new media to promote advocacy of their cause with the general public.

Advances in personal, mobile information technology provide the structure needed for new, highly informed, autonomous communities to converge around life choices, politics and everything in between (Rheingold, 2002). New media present participatory, democratic societal opportunities in which people can publicly express views and opinions and engage the broader community. Participatory new media, such as online communities, blogs, and wikis open a wide variety of new opportunities for activism (Kahn & Kellner, 2004). They also provide new opportunities for volunteer recruitment, engagement, and participation, the subjects of the next section.

### *New Media and Volunteerism*

New media make it easier for NPOs to recruit and engage today’s volunteers (Dhebar & Stokes, 2008). Online volunteer opportunities allow people to participate who otherwise could be limited by a busy schedule, distance, or a physical disability (Dhebar

& Stokes, 2008). For example, if an NPO attempts to raise awareness about a new campaign it is undergoing, if one is unable to physically go in public to do this, he or she could simply share links or posts of information with social networks online to achieve the same goal. Like any well-managed volunteer program, online volunteer programs espouse certain traits (Dhebar and Stokes, 2008). Successful online volunteer programs are those that have clearly defined goals, clear and regular communication, and a means for monitoring results.

To understand the landscape of volunteer activity in the U.S., a few insightful statistics can help create the general picture of volunteerism habits and characteristics in America. In 2008, approximately 61.8 million adults donated approximately eight billion hours of service in the U.S. (Volunteering in America, 2009). Among these volunteers are many young adults, a group that is often recognized for its knowledge and use of social media and technology. Over 441,000 more young adults (age 16-24) volunteered in 2008 than in 2007, up nearly 6 percent from approximately 7.8 million to over 8.2 million (Volunteering in America, 2009). Volunteers also make charitable contributions more frequently than non-volunteers. In 2008, 78.2 percent of the nation's volunteers made a charitable contribution or non-monetary donation of twenty-five dollars or more in value compared with 38.5 percent of non-volunteers. Understanding volunteer characteristics is important, because volunteer activity serves as one of the three main functions of nonprofit organizations.

A modern trend indicates that volunteer recruitment and engagement increasingly takes place via new media platforms. Many nonprofits could not accomplish all of their goals if they did not have volunteers. Funding simply is not available to pay salaries for

many of the essential tasks that NPOs accomplish, so volunteers help make it possible to offset financial constraints while reaching important goals. New media enable nonprofits to execute volunteer efforts and recruit volunteers with greater ease (Cravens, 2006; Dehbar & Stokes, 2009). One example exists at Pikes Peak United Way (PPUW) in Colorado Springs, CO. PPUW operates its own online database of volunteer opportunities within its organization and the community at large housed on [www.volunteerpikespeak.org](http://www.volunteerpikespeak.org). On February 21, 2010, the site listed 190 volunteer opportunities with which the public could get involved. This online forum is an essential recruitment piece for the annual fund allocations process at PPUW. Nearly 200 volunteers are needed each year to determine how the annual campaign funds will be distributed back into the community. I previously worked with the organization and observed that web-based media successfully enabled the organization to recruit volunteers (even for one of the programs I managed). This saved staff time that would otherwise be dedicated to fielding phone calls to accomplish the same goal of signing up volunteers.

As Fine (2006) discusses, the Green Media Toolshed is another organization that uses web-based technology to promote volunteer engagement. This organization keeps a directory of journalists interested in environmental causes. It has created a way for volunteers to help with the initiative online. This website allows individuals to spend as little as 15 minutes volunteering to create and maintain the site's directory. It allows the online volunteers to contribute meaningfully at their own convenience, and the grass-roots environmental organizations that use this directory have access to an updated resource that could not have afforded on their own.

Research supports that new media enable NPOs to connect with volunteers who they otherwise would not be able to find (O'Rourke & Baldwin, 2004). Online volunteers report overall satisfaction with the online volunteering process and have indicated that the online format makes them more likely to volunteer and find an opportunity well-suited for them (O'Rourke & Baldwin, 2004). The online volunteer trend is widespread and continues to grow as opportunities for new media usage among NPO volunteers continue to increase. Through interviews with NPO staff, this study probes into understanding in detail how new media enables NPOs to recruit and manage these volunteer opportunities.

### *New Media and Fundraising*

While new media have increased online volunteerism, they also have expanded the opportunities for NPO philanthropy. Around the turn of the century, an e-philanthropy revolution was forecasted by scholars Austin and Wendroff (2001). Since that time, a steady pickup in e-philanthropy movements have been noted, and scholars (e.g. Frumkin, 2006) have worked to understand and explain how the Internet fits into NPO marketing and fundraising strategies. Hart (2002) found that the Internet not only is a successful tool for raising money, it also provides an opportunity to build and improve important relationships with current and prospective supporters. Comparisons have also been made between traditional fundraising and e-fundraising (Jillbert, 2003). Jillbert argues that online philanthropy is more expansive, focused, and personalized than in traditional forms of fundraising and giving.

Technical firms promote web-based software that charities can use according to their specific goals and needs (Cohen, 2007). This software enables NPOs to create fundraising websites or virtual foundations (Frumkin, 2006) that allow supporters to

donate money from virtually anywhere. To think of it another way, the virtual foundation (or e-philanthropy) removes the need to make a phone call or send a check in the mail to make a donation. One of the most successful examples of e-philanthropy was first seen on a major scale after the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon in 2001 (Salamon, 2003). September 11<sup>th</sup> marked a turning point in online fundraising, as 10 percent of the money raised was through online donations (Salamon, 2003).

Another more recent example of large-scale philanthropy made possible by new media was the effort to provide relief for the victims of the Haitian earthquake. A major campaign by the American Red Cross encouraged individuals to text “Haiti” to “90999” on any cell phone to donate \$10 to Haiti relief efforts (US News & World Report, 2010). Other organizations joined in the push for texted donations including The Clinton Bush Haiti Fund, the MTV telethon, Salvation Army, UNICEF, and Habitat for Humanity (Choney, 2010). The texting campaign is the first widespread fundraising campaign of its kind and totaled over \$30 million raised (Choney, 2010). Other social media, such as Facebook and Twitter, along with widespread traditional media promotion, drew people to making donations via text.

The American Cancer Society’s *Relay for Life* provides another model for online fundraising. On the American Cancer Society website, race participants can create a personal website for his or her fundraising efforts. The participant then can send family, friends, and other acquaintances a link to the site. For those interested, the website provides the means for donating to the individual participant’s fundraising goal and information about the cause and how to get involved.

The Internet provides important advantages in terms of breadth (or how far reaching), exposure (being subjected to the particular mediated social opportunity), and the capacity (ability to accommodate numerous mediated social connections) to link people across distances that otherwise would not be able to find each other (Frumkin, 2006). For example, *Trees for Life* is a NPO that successfully implemented fundraising efforts through new media communication. This organization is located in China and connects with donors around the world through its Virtual Foundation on the Internet (Frumkin, 2006). It is because the organization operates using a virtual foundation that it is able to attract donors interested to their cause from across the world. Just 15 years ago, such capabilities were not widespread or as effective as in today's tech-savvy world. Now, significant dollars are raised worldwide through virtual foundations and e-philanthropy efforts new media enables.

In addition to texting campaigns and online donor appeals, traditional email may be one of the best new media fundraising tools for development staff (Olsen et al., 2001). If an organization's database maintains accurate donor information, email is a direct contact to where many people spend at least eight hours per day at work: in front of a computer. The challenge is maintaining an up-to-date database. As people frequently move, change jobs, or simply change their email addresses, it is difficult to keep up. Technology consulting firms can help NPOs who can afford their services to try to maintain the most up-to-date email database.

E-philanthropy has only been in the mainstream NPO practices for the past decade. New media opportunities are continually growing (such as the newer texting campaigns). Like many professions, NPOs are trying to link new media opportunities

with opportunities for organizational growth and advancement. This study will go beyond what we currently know about e-philanthropy by using in-depth interviews to gain detail about specific ways in which e-philanthropy works within the individual NPOs include in this study.

### *Theories That Inform New Media Use in NPOs*

Now that there has been discussion of some of the ways in which new media are being used in NPOs, the subsequent pages will explore two theoretical models that inform understanding of new media used by NPOs for mass communication. First, Rogers' (1962) Diffusion of Innovations theory will guide the study of new innovations and how they become mainstream. This theory is explored in relation to new media used in NPOs and how they become adopted. Also, a review of literature for the agenda setting model discusses the model's historical context, evolution, and modern application to the topic of new media used by NPOs. Aspects of agenda setting theory inform an understanding of how new media enable NPOs to have greater influence on their communities by making priority NPO issues salient within their publics, and thus providing more opportunities to achieve the goals of the NPO's mission.

### *Diffusion of Innovations*

New media have diffused into virtually all facets of business and personal communication in the U.S. The diffusion of innovations theory (Rogers, 1962) is a theoretical approach that helps scholars and technological adopters understand the communicative process that occurs as new media are adopted by society. For this paper, it helps in understanding the diffusion and adoption of new media by NPO employees and NP organizations. In the past decade, new media (such as those that are Internet-

based and mobile) have diffused rapidly. The 2009 United Nations International Telecommunications Union report indicates that 4.1 billion people globally pay for cell phone service (Tryhorn, 2009). That is more than half the global population and a large increase from just one billion cell phone subscribers in 2002 (Tryhorn, 2009). The report also found that nearly a quarter of the world's 6.7 billion people use the Internet (Tryhorn, 2009).

In the U.S., 220 million Americans have Internet access at home and/or work and 73%, or 162 million went online in May 2008 (Nielsen 2008). Watching video on the Internet is also popular in the U.S. as 119 million unique viewers viewed 7.5 billion video streams in May 2008 (Nielsen, 2008). Additionally, as of the first quarter of 2008, 91 million Americans (36% of all mobile phone subscribers in the U.S.) owned a video-capable phone (Nielsen, 2008). It appears that all people (except for laggards) have in some form adopted and embraced new media use.

The online sphere has provided new communication opportunities for its users, but of particular interest to this study is how new media have been adopted by NPOs and how doing so plays a role in the work of NPO professionals and the NPO's ability to influence its community.

#### *Diffusion of Innovations: Its Early History*

Good ideas and innovations do not automatically become adopted in society. Rather, widespread adoption is often difficult to achieve. All new technologies must undergo a specific communicative process in order to be successfully adopted by the target market.



Diffusion history spans over a century. In 1903, Gabriel Tarde, a French sociologist, social psychologist, lawyer and judge proposed generalizations about the diffusion of innovation which he called laws of imitation. He said he wanted to understand why if 100 innovations were created at the same time, 10 spread widely while 90 will be forgotten (Tarde, 1903). Tarde's laws of imitation were later furthered by the classic *Diffusion of Innovations* book written by Everett Rogers in 1962 (the model which guides the understanding of the diffusion process for this study). Tarde noticed that the rate of adoption of a new idea usually follows an S-shaped curve over time. Tarde was the European forefather of the diffusion field, but there was a 40-year lag before another study of such significance would occur (Rogers, 1995).

During this lag, there were still some contributions made to diffusion studies that should be briefly noted. In 1934, *innovation* was defined by Schumpeter as being the first introduction of a new product, process, method or system in his book titled *The Theory of Economic Development*. In 1940, sociologist Edgar McVoy examined the diffusion process in relation to social inventions. He examined the tendency for U.S. cities to adopt a City Manager Plan. He found that the size of the city influenced the acceptance of certain types of innovations.

#### *The Hybrid Corn Study*

The next groundbreaking diffusion study to follow Tarde (1903) occurred 40 years later. In 1943, two rural sociologists in Iowa, Bruce Ryan and Neal C. Gross, began studying the adoption process of hybrid corn by farmers in the 1930s. The team found that a small group of innovative farmers first used hybrid corn as an experiment. Once neighboring farmers saw how well hybrid corn worked in the fields, they also

adopted the new varieties. This innovation was one of the most important new farm technologies when it was released in 1928. Several new agricultural innovations accompanied the seed innovation from the 1930s to the 1950s. These ultimately led to an agricultural revolution in farm productivity (Rogers, 1995). Hybrid corn produced about 20 percent more corn crop per acre than the varieties it replaced. It was also more resistant to drought and worked better with mechanical corn harvesting machines.

When Ryan and Gross, both at Iowa State University, studied the adoption of hybrid corn, they interviewed 259 farmers living in two small communities. Everyone had adopted the new product between 1928 and 1941 and the researchers noticed that when adoption was plotted year-by-year, the adoption rate formed an S-shaped curve over time (Rogers, 1995). This is in line with Tarde's (1903) previous adoption findings. Ryan and Gross (1943) also found some specific adopter traits. The innovators were usually from larger-sized farms, had higher incomes, more formal education, and greater connections to Des Moines (the biggest city in Iowa). Ryan and Gross (1943) found that the innovation decision period (that time from first knowledge of the new product to its adoption) went slowly and took most farmers about nine years. These adopter traits are similar to those found in the adopter categories defined by Rogers (1995), which will soon be discussed in detail.

Ryan and Gross (1943) also found that communication channels (which will soon be discussed in detail) played a role in the adoption process. Although farmers generally first heard about hybrid corn from salesmen (which did persuade some early adopters), neighbors were the most likely to lead to persuasion. This finding highlighted the importance of interpersonal networks in the diffusion process. This laid a foundation for

future scholars to prove that the heart of the diffusion process is influenced both by opinion leaders (especially the media) and interpersonal networks. The exchanges that adopters have with others who become influenced to also adopt a new technology or product are a central component in the adoption process (Rogers, 1995).

*The Diffusion of Innovations: Everett Rogers*

Now that we know more about key moments in history that lead to today's understanding of diffusion, probably the most important addition to the understanding (and certainly the most important in relation to this study) comes from Everett Rogers' (1962) piece *The Diffusion of Innovations*. Here, Rogers studied the social and psychological processes that take place in adopting new technology. Rogers suggested that there are specific characteristics that make diffusion communication (the communication that surrounds a new product or idea) unique from other forms of communication. Diffusion communication is that which is concerned with a new idea. The newness of the idea or technology is the part of the communication that gives diffusion its special character. The newness means that some degree of uncertainty is involved (Rogers, 1995).

Rogers describes the diffusion process as one in which an innovation is communicated through certain channels over time among the members of a social system. This model is specifically concerned with the type of communication that is associated with new products and ideas (such as hybrid corn for farmers). The model addresses the uncertainty that comes with a new product or idea. Diffusion is a kind of social change and includes both planned and spontaneous sharing of new ideas.

*Diffusion Elements and Adopter Categories*

There are four main elements in the diffusion of innovations (Rogers, 1962): the innovation, communication channels, time, and social system.

### *The Innovation*

The first element to the diffusion of innovations is the innovation itself. The innovation is the new idea or object that appears to be new to the individual or group of adopters. Innovation characteristics are important in helping explain different rates of innovation adoption. The first innovation characteristic is relative advantage. This is the degree to which an innovation is perceived as better than the idea it comes after (Rogers, 1995). For example, when Palm released the Treo smart phone in 2002, many saw it as a better idea than a traditional mobile phone. Today, many other smart phones such as the iPhone and Android model phones have replaced the now archaic Treo as the better idea. The most important component of relative advantage is whether a person perceives it as advantageous. The greater one sees the advantage, the more quickly it will be adopted. History provides examples of innovations that have been adopted including everything from the light bulb, to the automobile, to the creation of a social networking platform like Facebook.

Compatibility is the second innovation characteristic. It is the degree to which an innovation is perceived as being in line with existing values, past experiences, and needs of potential adopters (Rogers, 1995). If an innovation is not in line with values and norms of a social system, it will not be adopted as quickly as one that is compatible. In the current study, new media offerings must be in line with the goals of the NPO and its mission before it can be adopted. If the technology assists the NPO achieve its goals of volunteerism, activism, and fundraising, it will have a greater likelihood of being

adopted. In order to adopt an innovation that is incompatible with the social system's beliefs and norms, a prior adoption of a new value system is required. An example of an incompatible innovation is introducing contraception in a social system where religious beliefs discourage using such techniques (Rogers, 1995). For contraception to be adopted, such communities would need to change their view on its use prior to adoption.

The next two innovation traits are complexity and trialability. Complexity is the degree to which an innovation is perceived as difficult to understand and use (Rogers, 1995). If potential adopters do not understand the innovation, it is less likely to be adopted. New ideas that are simpler to understand will be adopted more quickly than those that require new skills or knowledge to use the innovation. Trialability is the degree to which an innovation may be experimented with on a limited basis. People often want to try a product before fully adopting it. Ryan and Gross (1943) found that almost all farmers adopted hybrid corn on a trial basis by first trying it on small plots before using it as their only seed on the farm. If farmers had not been able to test the seed on a small scale first, it is likely adoption would have been a much slower process. Innovations that can be used on a trial basis provide less uncertainty, and therefore a more rapid adoption rate.

The final innovation characteristic is observability. This is the degree to which the results of an innovation are visible to others (Rogers, 1995). Observability promotes discussion of the new idea. If it is easier for people to see the results of an innovation, they are more likely to adopt it. If a co-worker in a NPO sees that someone in the office has an iPhone and that the person finds the phone to help keep him functional, organized, entertained and informed, it is more likely to be adopted by the person who sees the

innovation. Likewise, at the organizational level, NPO executives who learn about successful uses of new media by other NPOs may become more likely to adopt the new media and implement its use into the organizational philosophy.

### *Communication Channels*

Communication channels are the next important elements to the diffusion process. Communication channels are those through which there is an exchange of information regarding new ideas from one person to another in order to reach a mutual understanding (Rogers, 1995). They are the means through which a message can get from one person or unit to another. As previously discussed, diffusion is a particular type of communication where the information that is shared is concerned with new ideas. In the diffusion process, information is exchanged where one person shares a new idea to one or many others. This process involves four components: (1) an innovation, (2) an individual or other unit of adoption that has knowledge of or experience with using the innovation, (3) another person or unit that does not have knowledge of the innovation, (4) a communication channel connecting the two people or units (Rogers, 1995). The information exchange relationship between the pair will determine how a source will or will not share the innovation with the receiver and how the transfer of information will have an effect on the receiver.

Information channels as defined by Rogers (1995) can be mass media channels or interpersonal channels. Mass media channels are those that share messages through a mass medium and allow one or a few people to reach an audience of many. Rogers included radio, television, and newspapers as examples, but in today's society new media would also need to be included in this category. The current study focuses on the new

media information channels within NPOs and how they are utilized. Interpersonal channels that involve face-to-face exchange between two or more people are more effective in persuading someone to adopt a new idea. Today, new media also present interpersonal channels of communication via computer mediated communication that enable interpersonal communication through video chatting, online social networks, texting, emails, blogs, etc. These channels are also evaluated in the current study of NPOs. Most people do not rely on scientific evaluation of the innovation but rather, they depend on the evaluations of an innovation that are shared by other individuals like themselves who have already adopted the innovation.

### *Time*

The third element of the diffusion of innovations is time. Time is concerned with the period between innovation through either adoption or rejection. In other words, in the diffusion of innovations model, one should be concerned with time in relation to how quickly an innovation is adopted or rejected (Rogers, 1995). Time is involved in diffusion in three ways. First, it is used in the innovation-decision process by which a person goes from first knowing about an innovation until the person adopts or rejects the innovation. Second, time is used in examining the relative earliness or lateness with which an innovation is adopted in comparison with other members of a social system. Third, time is used to evaluate an innovations' rate of adoption in a system. This is usually measured as the number of members of the system that adopt the innovation within a period of time (Rogers, 1995). We can see examples where diffusion is measured in time in the hybrid corn study (Ryan & Gross, 1943) and in Singer's (2004) study of the diffusion of convergence in news organizations.

### *The Social System*

The last element of the diffusion of innovations is the social system. The social system is a set of intertwined units that interact in a joint problem-solving mission to achieve a common goal (Rogers, 1995). Social systems can be characterized as heterophilous or homophilous. The heterophilous social system embraces innovation, change, and new ideas. This social system is open to staying on the cutting edge of new innovations (Rogers, 1995). Many may think of modern U.S. major metropolitan areas with the latest technology and innovation as an example of this type of social system. A homophilous social system is one that is less innovative and stays locked within the norms of the social system (Rogers, 1995). One may think of rural areas where new innovations cannot diffuse as quickly or easily as such an example.

One's prior values, beliefs, and past experiences within a social system can hinder or advance the adoption process. Rogers (1995) defines a social system as "a set of interrelated units that are engaged in joint problem solving to accomplish a common goal. The units of a social system may be individuals, informal groups, organizations and/or subsystems" (p. 24). Each unit in a social system can be distinguished from other units and all members work together to solve a shared problem and reach a mutual goal. The objective sharing process is what binds the system together (Rogers, 1995). Social systems can range in size from everyone living on a city block to all of the consumers in the United States. It is within the social system that diffusion occurs.

One's closest personal contacts such as peers, colleagues, and family have an especially strong influence on whether or not one will adopt a particular innovation. In the NPO setting, one's co-workers and professional networks are influential in this



process. If the people that one trusts and respects adopt the particular innovation, an individual is more positively influenced by their adoptive behavior and therefore more likely to adopt an innovation. However, if the opposite takes place and the trusted peers choose not to adopt the technology, or adopt and do not value the innovation's use, than an individual is less likely to adopt the innovation.

One example provided by Rogers (1995) is an attempt to get 200 Peruvian families to boil water before drinking to prevent disease. Only five percent of the population was persuaded to boil the water. This effort failed largely due to pre-existing cultural norms and beliefs that hot water was used for sick people. In this example, the interpersonal network based on the cultural system's norms was largely influential in the adoption failure. In this example, it was too innovation-centered and not client oriented enough.

#### *Diffusion Adopter Categories*

The diffusion of innovations also consists of specific adopter categories that describe the time frame in which one adopts the new technology. These adopter categories include the innovator, early adopters, early majority, late majority, and laggards. To explain this, the adoption of the iPhone will be used as an example.

Innovators are the first people to adopt an innovation (Rogers, 1995). They generally are willing to take risks and may be high profile within the social system. An example is the producers at Apple who invented and first used the iPhone.

The early adopters represent the second group to adopt an innovation (Rogers, 1995). They are people who stay on the cutting edge of new technology. These are the people who stood in line at the Mac store to purchase the first iPhones when they were

released. In the current study, each NPO had one to three early adopters who influenced the adoption patterns within their organization. Organizations that strategically hired an early adopter generally embraced produced more new media activity before many of their NPO peers.

The early majority represents people who have let more time pass before adopting the innovation (Rogers, 1995). These are the people who did not wait in line to purchase the iPhone, but were part of a larger second wave of people purchasing the phone after some time had passed. For NPOs, these are the organizations that have adopted and implemented some new media use, but they are slower to adopt than the early adopters.

The late majority represents people who are a bit more skeptical about adopting the innovation (Rogers, 1995). The late majority waits for the early majority to adopt the product so that they can observe and evaluate whether or not it is worth adopting. After they feel confident in the innovation, they too will adopt it. An example of this includes people who waited for a second-generation iPhone to be released so that all of the “kinks” could be worked. Some of the NPOs involved in this study also fall into this category. The organizations waited to see how new media are used by others and are only now slowly incorporating new media into what they do.

The final adopter category is the laggards. Laggards are the very last to adopt an innovation. They are often adverse to major change and are more focused on traditions. Laggards are the people who probably still have not purchased an iPhone, but might years in the future. The adopter categories vary from the person who implements the new technology into society (the innovator) to the people who are the very last to conform to using the technology, the laggards (Rogers, 1995).

### *Opinion Leaders and Change Agents*

Now that we have discussed characteristics of diffusion and the various adoptive behaviors of social units, it is important to examine the roles that people play within a social system. Diffusion is particularly concerned with opinion leaders and change agents. This concept is particularly important for the present study because it looks into the ways that individual employees in NPOs can influence the adoption process within their organization.

An opinion leader is a person who is able to informally influence other peoples' attitudes or behaviors with relative frequency (Rogers, 1995). Opinion leaders earn this status through technical knowledge, social accessibility, and conforming to social norms. Because they are closely conformed to the system's norms, they have the ability to exemplify and express the system's structure (Rogers, 1995). Opinion leaders remain at the center of their system's communication networks; therefore they can serve as a social model whose innovative behaviors are often imitated by other members of the system. Opinion leaders are strongly linked members of the social system in which they use their influence. In this study, the Caring Community organization is a well-respected NPO in the community. It hosts seminars at its office and invites other NPOs from the community to learn about current issues of importance (including new technologies that are helpful for NPOs). They used their opinion leader status to impart knowledge in the community.

Change agents are people who influence clients' innovation decisions in a direction seen as desirable by a change agency (Rogers, 1995). Change agents may use opinion leaders within a social system to assist in diffusion campaigns. Change agents are

usually highly trained professionals with higher degrees in technical fields. They have social status that accompanies their elite education and knowledge, however sometimes that makes them quite different from their typical clients. Therefore, effective communication about the innovation they are promoting can be a challenge. In an NPO, a change agent could be a computer expert selling new database software that helps NPOs manage their contacts and finances. Sometimes a less educated change agent aide is used. This is someone who is more relatable to the client audience and can create a more natural connection with them (Rogers, 1995).

### *Diffusion, NPOs and New Media*

Diffusion theory provides an expansive framework for understanding the processes by which new technologies are diffused through society via unique diffusion communication practices. This is important because this knowledge provides a framework with which we can begin to examine new media adoption within the NPO setting. While the theory provides this framework, it fails to tell us in detail how individuals personally experience the new innovation and how the new innovation impacts the NPO in which they work and the community it serves. A qualitative methodology provides the opportunity to expand diffusion theory into a case study of several NPOs and how new media influences the people who work in them and the community they serve.

The current study holds appreciation for the body of knowledge presented by traditional diffusion scholarship and hopes to build upon it by applying an interpretive lens to how adoption is experienced. The case study approach that will be employed by this study allows for thematic analysis of the individual and organizational experiences

that takes place after adoption and application of an innovation within the nonprofit professions. The following section examines agenda setting theory to examine the tenants of this approach to then expand aspects of the theory for application in this study.

### *Agenda Setting*

Agenda setting theory addresses the salience of issues in the media (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Predominantly, agenda setting applies to issues of traditional or “old” media including TV, radio, and print publications such as newspapers or magazines. It is an exceedingly complex task to come to grips with the totality of what has been written on the topic (Kosicki, 1993). Work relevant to agenda setting is spread throughout journals in several adjacent academic fields, including political science, public policy, sociology, and psychology. Although this generally reflects the interdisciplinary nature of mass communication, it is especially true of agenda setting, because its subject matter crosses the boundaries of a number of fields.

The concept of agenda setting traces back to the work of journalist and political philosopher, Walter Lippmann. Lippmann argued that public opinion responds to the pseudo environment created by the media more so than the actual environment (Lippmann, 1922). He said that rather than seeing and then defining a situation, people define things first and then see through a vision that we personally form and choose through cultural stereotypes. In other words, rather than seeing a situation unfold and making judgments based on information gathered as we see it, we form opinions through interactions with individuals and mediated messages. These opinions tend to fall in line with overall social understandings and opinions (stereotypes). Lippmann (1922) argued that the pictures we create inside our heads do not correspond with the true outside world.

He argued that the pseudo-environment can greatly influence political behavior. While mainstream media still present the dominant influence in generating these pictures we create in our heads, communication via new media also allow the average citizen, business or nonprofit organization to play a role in influencing this pseudo-environment.

The agenda setting concept was then extended in 1963 by Benjamin Cohen in his study of American media coverage of foreign policy issues. He followed Washington-based correspondents and their government sources in his study and famously stated that the press may not always be successful in telling people what to think, but it is often successful in telling people what to think about (Cohen, 1963).

In 1972, McCombs and Shaw contributed to this body of knowledge and philosophy by conducting a study of the Humphrey/Nixon U.S. Presidential election. The study aimed to match what voters in Chapel Hill, North Carolina said were key issues in the campaign with the actual campaign media content that they used/viewed during the campaign. The study consisted of a content analysis of the news and interviews with local voters. Participants were randomly selected from lists of registered voters in five voting precincts in the city. Respondents were economically, socially, and racially representative of the community.

McCombs and Shaw (1972) completed 100 interviews between September 18 and October 6. Only people who had not yet fully committed to a particular candidate were interviewed. Along with interviews, the media (TV, radio, and newspapers) serving the community were content analyzed and coded into 15 categories that were representative of key campaign issues and news. The researchers found that the media had a considerable impact on voters' judgments of what they considered were major campaign

issues even though the participants had been asked to judge major issues regardless of what politicians may be saying at the time. There was a significant correlation between major campaign items emphasized by the media and the voters' personal judgment of what issues were important to the campaign. Voters tended to share the media's overall definition of what is important, therefore providing strong support of the hypothesis that the mass media have an agenda setting function on society. This is important to the current study of NPOs because while traditional agenda setting theory deals with "old" media, this study challenges that current agenda setting theory studies should also examine new media messages and the possible agenda setting function they (and the people or organizations sending them) have on society.

#### *Second-Level Agenda Setting*

Whereas the original McCombs and Shaw model of agenda deals with the concept of the media's ability to tell the audience *what* to think about (based on the amount of coverage and prominence of coverage), second-level agenda setting (also referred to as attribute agenda setting) focuses on the media's ability to suggest *how* the people should think about the issue. From this perspective, scholars look at not just the object of focus in the media, but rather they look at the actual attributes of those objects (Lopez-Escobar et al., 1998). In fact, each news object has numerous potential attributes that may be linked to it (McCombs et al., 2000). This is relevant to the current study because new media have the potential to form people's opinions of how to think about a particular issue.

One of the earliest second-level agenda setting studies was conducted by Weaver and colleagues in 1981. This study was not officially coined "second-level agenda

setting” but it examined the presidential attributes in the 1976 U.S. Presidential elections. They saw the transfer of attribute saliency between the media and public agendas. There was significant correlation between the candidate attributes presented in the media and the public perceptions of those attributes. Second-level agenda setting studies have focused on topics ranging from financial reporting (Hester & Gibson, 2003), international news coverage (Wanta et al., 2004), public reactions to September 11<sup>th</sup> (Craft & Wanta, 2005), and political candidates and elections (McCombs, 1997; McCombs et al., 2000).

Scheufele and Shanahan (2002) take second-level agenda setting to yet another level. They argue that by emphasizing certain attributes of an issue, the media tell us how to think about an issue as well as what to think about it (Scheufele & Shanahan, 2002).

Scheufele and Shanahan argue that there is a difference between the traditional understanding of framing and attribute agenda setting. From their perspective, framing involves media packages and frames that can serve as interpretive shortcuts to the audience based on the frames or interpretations provided by the media. They argue that framing assumes terminological or semantic differences in how an issue is covered rather than the salience of the issue that will evoke audience response. From the attribute agenda-setting perspective, certain issue attributes that are emphasized by the media to the public become more salient.

Agenda setting compares the focus of attention an issue is given by the mass media with the focus that the public has on the same issues. Alignment of the two is evidence to support the agenda setting model. The model has evolved over time to include second-level agenda setting and now is seeing new evolution and challenges as new media technologies rapidly diffuse into and become adopted by modern individuals



and organizations. McCombs (2005) notes that the Internet is “the new frontier” for research on agenda setting effects in comparison with the traditional understanding of agenda setting that began in 1972. This study of new media in NPOs aims to embark into the new frontier and gain an understanding of how new media are influencing today’s NPO, its employees, and its community. The following section will elaborate on the new frontier for agenda setting research and how NPOs may now be one of the evolving areas of study by this theoretical approach.

### *The New Frontier for Agenda Setting Research*

McCombs (2005) reports that some social observers see the beginning of the end of agenda setting. It is argued that new communications technologies fragment the audience and open mass communication to millions (McCombs, 2005). Although he provides significant evidence supporting that agenda setting continues to be relevant as mass media continue to dominate public information gathering and opinion in society, he also notes that through the evolution of the agenda setting model, some operational definitions have evolved going beyond the traditional media to public relationship. Instead, new media enable greater interaction between media producers and their audiences. Several studies of attribute agenda setting operationalize the objects of the agenda in regards to political candidates and public figures (McCombs, 2005). Innovative scholars have applied agenda-setting theory to a variety of new areas including religion, teaching, corporate reputations, and sports (McCombs, 2005). The scope of the publics attended to by agenda setting theory (as it has evolved) ranges widely from the mass general public to rather limited publics, such as those that might be found in a traditional local NPO.

Because agenda setting is a process of media influence (intended or unintended) by which the relative importance of news events or issues in the public mind is affected by the order of presentation (or relative salience) in news reports, it is assumed that the more the media attention an issue gets, the more importance a news audience will attribute to that topic. Agenda setting embraces the notion that the media inform people what to think about. This links to the current study, because it raises the argument that new media enable a greater number of organizations and individuals to contribute to the media that is consumed by mainstream society. Examples of this would include YouTube postings that spread widely, blogs that are followed by hundreds of thousands of people, or email newsletters that reach the masses. A growing number of scholars now are rethinking and reviewing the ways in which traditional mass communication theories apply (or fail to apply) to the study of new media (Meraz, 2009; Woodyly, 2008). The goal of this study is to add to that body of literature and knowledge by giving a new, highly detailed look into how new media influence NPOs and work.

#### *New Media Technologies Enable NPOs to Serve an Agenda Setting Function*

It is important for an NPO to have access to its constituents and potential constituents to accomplish its three main functions discussed earlier: activism, fundraising, and volunteer activity (Fine, 2006). Nonprofit organizations often strategically structure NPO messages and events so that that the media will include the NPO in its coverage (Bacon, 2004). Prior to new media, NPOs relied on costly press conferences, news releases, mailings or scarcely donated media opportunities in order to get the word out about a particular effort. Today's new media allow NPOs to create a direct connection with its community through websites, social networking, email, and

other communicative approaches. These direct mass/mediated communication capabilities enable NPOs to serve a media distribution function in society.

Because NPOs can distribute mediated messages on a large scale, NPOs also have the ability to make issues and issue attributes salient in the minds of thousands or millions recipients (in the case of large-scale nonprofits). This new ability to promote issue salience among a mass audience is a mirror to the agenda setting function of traditional mass media. New media have enabled NPOs, organizations that have an obligation to provide a public service (as do the media), to serve an agenda setting function in society. New communication technology (such as blogs, email, and virtual networks) allows NPOs to develop the public issues of importance with their constituents and the traditional media. This capability enables the NPO to stress important issues to hundreds, thousands, even millions via digital communication. It is quite possible that a mass email sent from one of the nation's largest NPOs to its constituents could be received by a far greater number of people than receivers of traditional media messages in a small or medium media market. A direct connection with constituents also allows the NPO to control the message that is delivered rather than relying on a traditional journalist's interpretation through mainstream news outlets.

The historic models of agenda setting will likely continue to focus on the traditional mainstream media. However, many scholars and journalists have studied new media and its impact on traditional journalism and society (Fineberg, 2002; Gillmor, 2006; Pavlik, 2001;). These studies find that the new media landscape is transforming media at a more rapid pace than ever seen before (Pavlik, 2001). Also, the public widely accepts digital news as a credible source (Fineberg, 2002). Web-based communication technology

allows anybody to be a publisher and journalist. Furthermore, the web allows anyone to distribute one's ideas publicly to tens of millions of people, and in the process has changed the scope of mass communication.

*Could New Media Give NPOs Greater Agenda Setting Power?*

In the most recent history of mass communication that spans over the past 10 to 15 years, there are some who ponder whether the mass communication concept still works. Chafee and Metzger (2001) identify changes in the contemporary media environment that challenge long-standing conceptions of mass communication. In particular, they argue that many of the theoretical models that have their basis in a centralized mass media system may have to be reconsidered for an era of a new decentralized and demassified media environment. Chafee and Metzger provide an argument that the traditional conceptualization for agenda setting may have to have some new considerations in the era of new media.

While the centralized, traditional media structures remain the dominant influencer of issue salience in society, there are windows of opportunity for other individuals and organizations to influence issue salience in society. Perhaps in an era of new media opportunities, NPOs have an even greater possibility for influencing their communities and thus playing an agenda setting role in society.

Drezner and Farrell (2004) agree that nonprofits have a unique opportunity in their homes through the use of new communication technologies. Individual and group engagement takes place online and creates dialogues through government, nonprofits, and citizens. New media allow for connection directly with the community at large, bypassing both internal and news based editorial control. Even the editor-in-chief of the *U.S. News*

*& World Report* sees new communication technology influencing what people think about. He says they transforming the way Americans get information and think about important issues in a revolutionary way and that there is no turning back (Wyld, 2008).

Digital technology allows individuals and small groups to bring big change (Fine, 2006). Because of the low cost or free access to many of the most common new media platforms used (such as websites, Facebook, and Twitter) and because of their ease of use, connections are facilitated and strengthened. Fine says that the challenge today for NPO leaders in a connected age is to realize that adopting new media is easy compared with changing minds about social change. In other words, it is much easier to lure an audience to a new media offering than to change its ideologies related to social issues.

#### *Agenda Setting and the Present Study*

Agenda setting theory provides a framework for the execution and analysis of the current study. The theory addresses mediated messages and issue salience. Although the traditional agenda setting approach provides explanations supporting the influence of traditional media on issue and attribute salience in society, what it does not do is explain how such an influence presents itself within an individual's life or within the organization's relationship with its community. Agenda setting theory provides valuable insight into traditional media and society, and for this study, it serves as a springboard in developing a qualitative line of inquiry regarding the influence that NPO-produced new media may have on NPO professionals and the NPO's influence on its community. The agenda setting model has helped to create a starting point for this case study design. The understanding of agenda setting from a traditional media standpoint helps the researcher to extrapolate some of its tenants to designing the current study.

### *Research Questions*

To better understand how new media affect NPOs and NPO employees, I have specific questions I sought to answer through the participant interview process.

Interviewees are from the city of “Springfield” (a pseudonym for the actual city in which interviews took place). Explicit detail regarding the method follows in the next chapter.

The case study method has been adopted to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: How are new media introduced and incorporated into the work of NPO employees and NPOs in Springfield?

RQ2: How do Springfield NPOs and their employees use new media to achieve specific outcomes and goals to help with their NPO’s ability to influence their community?

To clarify what is meant by the broad term “community,” in the context of this study it refers to people whom the NPO serves (i.e. the benefactors of the services provided by the organization), the people who support the NPO (i.e. donors, volunteers, champions of the organization), and the people who live in the service area of the NPO (in this study, it is the people of Springfield and any surrounding areas that an NPO may serve).

Data is analyzed at two levels: that of the individual and that of the organization. It is important to analyze both levels to fully understand how new media influence the NPO, its workers, and its interactions with its community. I asked questions of NPO professionals to answer the two RQs in terms of how it relates to the individual NPO work experience as well as how it relates to the NPO’s organizational experiences. The research questions for this study are theoretically guided, as that is the most preferable

approach to case study research (Yin, 2009). RQ1 is guided by the diffusion of innovations theory. It aims to understand the process and experience of new media becoming incorporated into and used by NPOs and their employees. RQ2 is guided by agenda setting theory. While traditional agenda setting theory relates to the mainstream media's ability to influence its audience, this question aims to understand how new media enable NPOs to have an influence on their community.

## CHAPTER THREE

### METHODS

This chapter explains the research method that is used in this study. Coming from the interpretive paradigm, a case study approach is utilized to seek answers to the research questions and analyze the data for emergent themes. Case studies use a method in which an observation of a bounded system (a single case) or multiple bounded systems (multiple cases, as used in this study) takes place over time through detailed in-depth data collection that uses multiple sources of information (Creswell, 2007). In this study in-depth interviews and observation of new media serve as the information sources. Using the information gathered, a case study researcher then reports a case description and case-based themes (Creswell, 2007). This study is a multiple case study. In this type of study, one issue is selected and multiple cases are used to illustrate the issue (Creswell, 2007). To illustrate the new media use in NPOs and how such use influences the NPO community, seven cases were selected for analysis.

#### *Qualitative Methods and the Interpretive Paradigm*

Interpretive inquiry is an approach that is used in numerous social science disciplines to understand a socially constructed picture of reality that is based on the experiences of individual participants (Anderson, 1996; Mumby, 1997). The goal is not to construct an overarching, generalizable definition of reality. Keeping in this tradition, the goal of this study is not to extrapolate generalizable knowledge about the use of new media by NPO organizations and the professionals who work in them. Instead, the goal is to hear personal accounts of the unique experiences in this context. Rather than gaining an understanding of the large-scale NPO sector, this study aims to gain highly detailed



information from a smaller number of individuals at seven nonprofit organizations within the same large city in the Western U.S. This approach is preferred for this study to obtain detailed insight into the ways in which new media influence NPOs, their employees, and their communities. Generalizable, quantitative methodology cannot evoke this kind of insight and detail.

There are several characteristics of qualitative research that makes it unique from other forms of inquiry. First, qualitative research generally takes place in the field rather than in a controlled lab setting, such as in many quantitative studies (Creswell, 2009; Patton, 2002). The qualitative research environment is not controlled, but rather it is the natural environment where participants would typically exist whether participating in research or not. Qualitative research does not develop theory or hypotheses *a priori*, another key distinction from quantitative research. Qualitative research is inductive in nature, meaning that the study uses a variety of individual cases and then extrapolates patterns from them to form a conceptual category (Charmaz, 2006).

The role of the researcher in qualitative research is another defining feature. From this approach, the presence of the researcher is an important component to any study. While systematic means of data collection are used, the researcher is the one who gathers the information and does not rely on instruments, formulas, or questionnaires developed by other researchers. Throughout the research process, the researcher remains focused on understanding the meaning that participants ascribe to the research problem. However, because qualitative research is a form of interpretive inquiry (Berger, A., 1998; Creswell, 2009; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003) the researcher's interpretation of what is seen, heard and understood remains tied to the researcher's own background and understanding. For this

study, my own background in journalism, mass communication, and nonprofit work certainly plays a role in how data is understood and interpreted. I am not an outsider to these fields.

In addition to being an interpretive form of inquiry, qualitative research is emergent in design. This means that the research process can change or shift once the researcher begins data collection in the field. The key is to learn about the problem at hand from the participants' viewpoints. If necessary, the interview questions, data collection approaches, and participants included in the study may be changed during the research process. The goal is to gain a holistic account of the research problem by reporting the perspectives needed to understand the larger picture (Charmaz, 2006). In my research experience, there were certainly times when additional questions were asked of participants base on the course of our discussions. Qualitative research allows the flexibility to adjust the line of questioning as necessary to derive the desired information.

As mentioned previously, analysis of the data in this study looks at both new media's influence on the individual work experience as well as how it impacts the overall NPO and its relationship with its community. The qualitative approach to this study allowed me to obtain the rich, thick descriptions of life experiences in the workplace that emerged from in-depth interviews. The case study approach allowed me to hear from three nonprofit professionals at seven different organizations. I was able to get in-depth information from multiple individual perspectives within each of the organizations I studied. Additionally, direct observation (Yin, 2009) allowed me to view examples of new media products produced by each of the nonprofit organizations studied. Yin (2009) says, "If a case study is about a new technology...observations of the technology...at

work are invaluable aids for understanding the actual uses of the technology...or any potential problems being encountered” (p. 110). Direct observation allowed me to view new media in its natural setting as it is publicly made available by the nonprofits of study.

The next sections of this chapter describe the study participants and data collection procedures. The chapter also explains the explanation building approach (Yin, 2009) used for data analysis.

### *Participants*

The 21 participants in this study were from nonprofit organizations within a large Western U.S. city that has a metro area of about 600,000 people. It shall be referred to as “Springfield.” Purposive sampling (Patton, 2002; Creswell, 2009; Yin, 2009) was employed using the maximum variation approach. From this approach, the researcher purposefully picked participants from NPOs that varied in organizational focus and affiliations. By doing this, the study includes a variety of NPOs that each has a different mission focus. This variety is important to help identify common patterns that cut across variations (Patton, 2002). The 2010 Nonprofit Directory for the city in which research was conducted was used to identify a group of NPOs that represent varying interests, focuses, and reach. Participants were employees who use new media regularly in their work to accomplish one of the three main functions of nonprofits described previously (advocacy, fundraising, and volunteer efforts). The nature of these three functions means that the employees who perform these functions use new media for external communication as part of their work. Participants in this study included employees holding titles such as CEO, Marketing Director, Communications Manager, and Development Associate. For the purpose of this study, use of new media included using

technology such as email, social networking, website messaging, online fundraising and/or volunteer recruitment, mobile device communication, software, and other forms of new media activities that were revealed during the interview process.

Nine of the study participants came from three local NPOs. They are organizations that do not fall under the umbrella of a national organization and operate independently. Twelve additional participants came from four NPOs in the same city, however these NPOs have an affiliation with a national nonprofit organization. For example, one local nonprofit, Serving Seniors, is a locally based NPO that provides services to senior citizens. It is not affiliated with a national organization. Caring Community on the other hand is a locally run, independent NPO that is a member organization of the Caring Community Worldwide organization. An organization like Caring Community represents a nationally affiliated NPO used in this study.

To recruit study participants, I solicited professionals working in seven different NPOs in Springfield. These professionals worked in the areas of advocacy and communications, fundraising, and/or volunteer efforts. I first determined which organizations would be involved in this study by using maximum variation purposive sampling as described. Once I selected the organizations of focus, I then contacted individuals in each organization to set up interviews. I secured interviews by using a combination of personal connections within the nonprofit sector in Springfield and information I gathered by doing online research that identified people with titles that suggested they would be a good fit for this study. To recruit participants, I emailed professionals at each NPO and invited them to participate in my study (see recruitment script in appendix A). Most people responded quickly and no one refused an interview.

For those who took more than two business days to reply, a follow-up phone call or email was made to try to reach the potential participant. As I secured the first participant at each organization, I also asked that person if there was anyone else on their staff with whom they thought I should talk. Several interview participants were identified through this approach. As previously mentioned, nine of the participants came from independent local NPOs and 12 participants came from local NPOs that are affiliated with a national NPO. Interviews were conducted until I arrived at recurring trends and patterns in the participant responses. Data analysis observed these trends and patterns on two levels: how new media influences the individual NPO work experience and how new media influences the overall nonprofit organization to provide an understanding of how new media adoption manifests itself within the organization as well as how the adoption results in organizational changes.

### *Procedure*

In-depth interviews and direct observation were the two approaches used to gather data for this case study. These methods were chosen because they allowed me to collect the data needed to analyze new media use by NPO professionals. Furthermore, these approaches are known as two of the most commonly used and most useful ways to collect case study evidence (Yin, 2009).

### *In-Depth Interviews*

First, I will discuss the in-depth interview procedure used for this study. In-depth interviews allow participants to share a detailed, personal account of the lived experience as it is remembered (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2008). In-depth interviews are a widely used method within the interpretive paradigm to help understand lived experiences. The in-

depth interview allows for the participants to speak freely about the topic at hand, giving the researcher rich, thick descriptions of the problem. Interviews provide an appropriate approach for this study to obtain detailed information about the work of nonprofit professionals.

While there are many benefits to in-depth interviews, as with any method, there are also limitations. First, in-depth interviews can take an extensive amount of time to collect. The interviews for this study took approximately 25 hours for the meetings, and about 100 hours for transcribing interviews. To deal with this challenge, very careful planning and scheduling on my part was essential, and I transcribed each interview immediately after it was completed. Another limitation to in-depth interviews is that participants' responses may be distorted by personal bias, anxiety, or emotions (Patton, 2002). To counteract this, I assured each interviewee that all of the information they shared during interviews was completely confidential and that identifying information would be masked for anonymity. This seemed to relieve some tension or anxiety they might be experiencing. The participants may also be subject to recall-error, reacting to the interviewee, or providing self-serving responses (Patton, 2002). To deal with these challenges, I allowed the participants to speak for as long as it took them to fully explain each response. If something was unclear, I asked a follow-up question. For example, one participant consistently said "we" in his responses. In doing so, he was referring to new media use at his organization. To probe further, I asked if "we" describes the new media activity that he produces *for* the organization. I wanted to clarify if he was the one producing the content or if there were others. By asking this question, he thought a

minute and clarified that in fact it is not “we” but “I” since he is the one producing these products.

To guide the interview process, I used qualitative interview methodologies and techniques outlined by Kvale and Brinkmann (2008). I conducted in-depth interviews that were guided by a predetermined list of questions during the interview. I used an interview protocol (see appendix B) as a guide to each interview while also allowing the flexibility to ask additional questions as seemed appropriate to obtain information pertinent to this study. The questions asked provoked the participants to explain their new media use at work as related to the study’s research questions and its guiding theories. Questions were specifically asked to probe into the diffusion process within the NPO and individual work experiences, such as, “How did new media become incorporated into the way you do your work?” and “What role do you see yourself having in new media adoption within your organization?” To probe into the agenda setting process within the NPO, individual workers and the NPO’s community I used questions like, “How are new media used to interact with your organization’s community?” and “Do you think new media allow your organization to serve a news producing function?” A complete list of all interview questions can be found in Appendix B.

To test the interview protocol, a pilot study was conducted. I interviewed three NPO professionals to determine if the questions I asked made sense to the interviewees and if the questions truly were able to evoke the answers I was hoping to find for this study. A few minor changes were made, but overall the interview protocol worked well. After some adjustments and fine-tuning, a final interview protocol was established to use with subsequent interview subjects.

In addition to the formal questions found in the interview protocol, I also had each participant answer some basic questions about their work to capture demographic information from all participants. Participants indicated how long they had worked in NPOs, how long they had worked in their current role, their job title, and the type of work performed. Additionally, I asked each participant if I would be able to follow up with additional questions if needed.

In-depth interviews are valuable because they allow the dialogue to flow freely in interviews. This method allowed me to ask additional probing questions as provoked by the conversation (Creswell, 2009). Interviews lasted between 30 and 60 minutes in length. Most interviews were conducted in person either at the interviewee's place of work or a local coffee shop. The interviewees were provided an informed consent document that outlined the nature of the research (see appendix C) and they were asked permission to record the interview (all participants were agreeable with recording). A digital recorder was used to record the interviews. A few interviews that could not be conducted in person were conducted by phone. For phone interviews, I used two approaches for recording the discussion. For most phone interviews I used Skype software on my computer to call the participant. Our discussion was audible through the speakers on my computer, and I put my digital recorder next to the speaker to record the audio. There was one interview where I could not be near a computer when we had our discussion, so I used the record feature on my cell phone to record the audio.

The recorded audio from each of the interviews was transcribed, and identifying names and locators masked for anonymity to protect the identification of the participants involved in this study. I personally transcribed each of the interviews, which allowed me



to reexamine each discussion and begin taking mental notes of the important data themes. The transcribed interviews totaled 156 pages of single-spaced data (using 12-point Times New Roman font and 1” margins on each page).

Prior to collecting data, all data collection procedures were submitted to the University of Missouri Institutional Review Board (IRB) and approved. As participants were provided with detailed information regarding their voluntary consent to participate, they were also provided contact information for the IRB, my advisor, and me in case questions regarding the study should arise. Participants were also provided with a copy of the informed consent document to keep for their records.

#### *Direct Observation*

Direct observation was an additional data collection procedure used for my research that enabled me to see how the organization publicly uses new media to interact with and influence its community. I observed the new media activity of the NPOs with which I interacted. Specifically, I observed the new media outputs that are publicly accessible. These included posts on Facebook, Twitter, and the organization’s website. I became a Facebook and Twitter “follower” or “fan” for each of the organizations to view their posts. I watched the daily activity that unfolded in cyberspace during the month of December 2010. Direct observation allowed me to get a sense of the new media content that each organization was publicly producing. I looked to see how often each organization sent messages via web-based new media channels as well as what types of messages they posted through these forums. I copied the content from each forum into a Microsoft Word file so that I could easily view posts for the individual organizations over the entire month and observe any patterns or themes that emerged. I printed each

document and noted any posts that stood out from the others or notable themes that occurred throughout. These notes were then compiled for analysis and reporting (found in chapter four).

#### *Data analysis: Case Study*

In the data analysis process, the lenses of diffusion of innovations theory and agenda setting theory were used to inspect the data and look for themes that emerge from the data. Yin (2009) says that the most preferred strategy for case study research is to follow theoretical propositions to lead the case study. It guides the original objectives and design of the study, which influences the research questions, literature review, and hypotheses.

Data interpretation for this study follows the analysis format identified by Creswell (2007) for a multiple case analysis. This protocol calls for the researcher to first provide a detailed description of each case and themes within the case (a within-case analysis), followed by a thematic analysis across cases (a cross-case analysis), followed by assertions or an interpretation of the meaning of the cases overall. Interviews with individual NPO employees and observations of NPO new media products provided the data for the case study and enabled me to analyze the data at both the individual and the organizational levels. The combined data were used to analyze how new media influence the individual NPO work experience as well as how new media influence the interaction that the NPO has with its community. Data analysis for this case study led me to the final step, which is reporting the meaning of the cases in this study, explaining what is learned from this research, and the study's implications for the future (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

In order to thematically analyze the data collected through in-depth interviews and

direct observation as previously mentioned, a thematic analysis of the case studies was conducted (Kvale & Brinkman, 2008). Thematic analysis is qualitative data analysis method that looks for themes or categories that emerge from the data. According to Owen (1984), “Themes, then, are less a set of cognitive schema than a limited range of interpretations that are used to conceptualize and constitute relationships” (p. 274). Owen states that in order for a theme to emerge, it must meet three criteria: recurrence, repetition, and forcefulness. Recurrence means that at least two parts of a text have the same meaning, even if different wording is used. Repetition is an extension of recurrence, in that the meaning is occurring multiple times over different texts or recordings of data. Forcefulness refers to vocal emphasis or other nonverbal indications that the participant uses to emphasize certain words. Using Owen’s standards for emerging themes, I began to systematically analyze the data.

I first read through all of the transcribed interviews and made notes in the margins of the pages as something caught my attention as being directly tied to the two overarching research questions. I then used highlighting capabilities in Microsoft Word to code the emerging themes by specific categories. These categories were tied to specific questions I asked the participants regarding aspects of their new media uses (such as how it has changed their work, how it allows them to influence their community, whether or not new media enable them to serve a news producing function, etc.). These categories were then further broken down by characteristics that defined them. Such characteristics included how media changes one’s work. Many people described some positive ways in which work has changed (such as the ability to be more efficient, reach more people quickly, reach out to a new audience). While many participants also described the

negative impacts of new media adoption (such as the increased pace of work that requires employees to be available around the clock). Each of the emergent categories that emerged were grouped together until multiple cases combined to create an overall theme for the study. Once the data was completely coded and themes defined, I began Kvale and Brinkman's (2008) final step of the interview process, verification.

### *Verification*

Similar to reliability and validity in quantitative research, the verification process is a critical step in any qualitative study. While a qualitative researcher cannot completely understand how a study participant experiences a particular situation, the goal of the verification process is to confirm that the research properly illuminates the experiences of the participants (Creswell, 2009). Verification allows the researcher to determine if he or she accurately captured the essence of the participants' lived experiences. Creswell (2009) provides several techniques used for verification. It is recommended that at least two of these techniques are used in a qualitative study. I have used four of these methods to ensure that the findings of my research are reflective of the lived experiences of the NPO employees with whom I spoke.

I first used the peer review verification technique for an external check on the research process (Creswell, 2009). Peer review has some similarities to inter-rater reliability in quantitative research. A peer reviewer keeps the researcher honest by asking hard questions about methods, interpretations, meanings, etc. (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The strength of this approach is the cathartic process that can take place for the researcher (Creswell, 2009). Reviewers can listen to the researcher's feelings providing the opportunity for catharsis through sympathetic listening. It allows the researcher to flush

out any issues with the project through an honest, open conversation with a scholarly peer. A limitation of the approach is that if the researcher consults with multiple scholarly peers for peer review, there may be conflicting feedback and suggestions for the study. As a result, this process can take a great period of time to truly flush out the methodology, interpretations and meanings of the study in progress. My dissertation advisor, dissertation committee, and communication peers in my Ph.D. program serve as the scholarly peers who have reviewed this study. My adviser is familiar with nonprofit work and mass communications, so she can easily identify gross misrepresentations of each field. However, she is not personally engaged with any of the specific organizations I spoke with, so she can serve as an independent, unbiased reviewer of the data. After writing up the results, my adviser viewed and reviewed the entire study. We talked multiple times by phone and email to fine tune and most accurately represent the data and findings. My doctoral committee comprised of four additional Ph.D.s who are well versed in mass communication (and two also have expertise in public affairs/nonprofits) served as four additional peer reviewers in this process.

The second verification approach I used was the use of thick, rich descriptions (Creswell, 2009). In the analysis portion of the study, I used large portions of participant interviews. The use of such detail allowed the character and opinions of the interviewee to shine through the data analysis. By doing this, the participants used their own words to explain the emerging themes in this study.

The third verification I used in this study is member checking, or the process in which the researcher asks the participants for their feedback. In particular, the researcher is looking for the participants' view on the findings and their credibility (Creswell, 2009).

It is said that this is the most critical technique for establishing credibility in qualitative research (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). This process took place when the analysis was in its rough draft form. The strength of this approach is that it allows for any need changes to be made to the analysis and conclusions of the study before the study report is finalized. During this process participants were able to share their views of my analysis and highlight any data that appeared to be inaccurate or missing. A limitation of this approach is that it can sometimes be challenging to reengage participants for a follow-up meeting, or it can take a lengthy amount of time to receive responses. People have great demands on their time, and sometimes it can be difficult to get several participants to participate in the verification process. I used the member checking process to check emergent themes with participants to determine if my findings are accurate representations of the participants' experiences. To do this, I contacted four of the participants from the study. Two were from a nationally-affiliated NPO and two were from a local NPO. I did not use more than one person from each NPO for this process. I sent each participant a one-page summary of the results (see appendix D) for their review and asked them to let me know their thoughts about the summary. Each participant seemed interested in the findings and said that they found the research summary to be in line with information they reported during the interview process. One participant whose organization is slower in adopting new media said that she was interested to see how others are using new media to successfully benefit their NPOs.

The last verification technique for this study is clarifying biases the researcher may have in doing the research. As a former employee of nonprofit organizations, I enter this study with a particular interest in their work and how it is done. I frequently

volunteer with nonprofit organizations and have a good understanding of how they operate. By the nature of being human, I also have opinions about nonprofits and nonprofit employees. I personally think they hold a valuable place in society and provide very important services to people who need them. I acknowledge these biases, however I have made a conscious effort to put these biases and opinions aside and allow the voices of the individuals in this study to speak freely and direct the outcomes and results. As I analyzed the data, I questioned my own interpretations to make sure that the interpretation I concluded was truly one representative of the data provided by participants rather than my own personal opinions and experiences.

Systematic data collection, analysis, and verification of findings have guided this study's goal to complete a case study resulting in thematic analysis (Yin, 2009). The goals of this study are to understand the NPO new media adoption process and how it is experienced by NPO workers and to understand how new media adoption manifests in the NPO and individual workers' communication patterns and influence (agenda setting function) within the NPO's community. Studying seven NPO cases has allowed me to identify patterns of activity taking place within the professional lives of NPO professionals with whom I spoke as well as the patterns of activity taking place at the NPO's organizational level of influence within its community.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### RESULTS

To analyze the findings from the data collected, this section reviews the data on two levels: how new media influences the individual NPO work experience and how new media influences the overall nonprofit organization. Analysis on these two levels provides the most thorough understanding of how new media adoption manifests itself within the NPO and how they are experienced by NPO workers. These levels of analysis also provide insight into how new media adoption enables the NPO and individual workers to influence their community. In this chapter, I provide a summary of the cases that includes a description of each case, the people interviewed, and overall themes that emerged within the case. Next, I provide a cross-case analysis that identifies themes across cases that emerged (Creswell, 2007). Lastly, this section will outline the interpretations of these analyses and the implications that they have (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) on mass communication theory and practical practices of new media use within NPOs. Participant responses help to answer the two main research questions for this study:

RQ1: How are new media introduced and incorporated into the work of NPO employees and NPOs in Springfield?

RQ2: How do Springfield NPOs and their employees use new media to achieve specific outcomes and goals to help with their NPO's ability to influence their community?

#### Summary of Cases



This section provides an overview of each of the cases studied and the themes that emerged within each NPO case (Creswell, 2007) in Springfield. Three of the cases focus on local, independent nonprofit organizations. These organizations exist only in Springfield and operate independently of any national organization. Four additional cases focus on nationally-affiliated local NPOs. For example, the American Red Cross has several local chapters. Although the American Red Cross was not used in this study, if I had interviewed professionals at the local Springfield chapter of the American Red Cross, this would be an example of a nationally-affiliated local NPO. In each case, the data reveal two levels of information. First, there is information that reflects the experiences of the individual nonprofit employees as they describe them. Second, the direct observation process allowed me to see first-hand the ways in which these NPOs are publicly promoting themselves through new media use. This provides an organizational-level analysis of each case that is based on my interpretations of the public new media activity I observed. The following is a summary of each case, descriptions of the people I spoke to, and a report of the new media observations of each organization during the month of December 2010. Just as the city's name has been masked for anonymity, the names of participating individuals and their organization's names have been changed.

#### *Local Case 1: Kids First*

Kids First is the first local case I will analyze. Three professionals were interviewed at this organization. Kids First is a local nonprofit that employs 365 people and provides free preschool and comprehensive services to children and families living in poverty. They have a local brand, but the organization receives a significant portion of its funding from federal and state revenue streams. In challenging economic times with state

and federal budgets constantly in flux, Kids First is like all nonprofits in that organizational efforts for fundraising are a major focus for this organization. They have recently ramped up new media investment and efforts, and as a result have enjoyed the benefits of this effort. The organization was recently recognized by the city's "best of" section of the local business magazine. It was recognized in six categories, several of which highlighted their excellence in new media use.

I first interviewed Norma, the CEO. She has worked at the organization since 1991 and has overseen its many technological changes during her tenure. She has witnessed the adoption of new media from its beginning. She has steered the organizational ship into the digital age of new media adoption.

Norma is in her late 50s and enjoys new media, but also is a bit skeptical at times. She says she and her colleagues were discussing new media use at a staff meeting a couple of years ago and they were trying to figure it out. She explains how her personal perceptions of new media use influenced how she initially made decisions about what was appropriate new media use at Kids First. She said she:

Came to it (new media) from the perspective of watching my 26 year-old daughter spend hours on Facebook wondering what...how that contributes to your quality of life (laugh), you know...that kind of thing. Um, and being very suspicious of using those kinds of tools, um, during the work day. I mean you're always going to have people who aren't going to make the best possible choices around what they should or shouldn't be doing with their work time, but the bottom line is that we can turn that love of, um, digital communication to um, our

advantage...we can make our business much more efficient (Interview with Norma, 3).

I then interviewed Chrissy, the Kids First Community Relations Director. Chrissy is a social worker by trade, but is now the Communications Manager for the organization. Chrissy first worked with the organization in 1995. She took a few years off to stay home with her young children, and then returned to work with Kids First. Chrissy says technology at Kids First has changed a lot since she left:

You know what it was...and it freaked me out. I had been home for seven years with my kids...Wow I went back to work first at (the local) mental health (agency). So I'm a therapist, and that's my background and I went back to supervise therapists, and I was just overwhelmed. They were like OK you're gonna fill out your schedule online here, and in the schedule you'll see this, and if it's something personal you'll use this. I mean, just using Outlook, I was still using a Daytimer and had a calendar on my fridge, you know? I knew how to use email, and I was using email with friends, and I thought I was a big girl because I had a signature block, but that was different. We did reports online, I mean families came in for their very first appointment, and they're filling it out right there and filed with the scheduling office and I didn't know. Do I save this to my desktop? Do I not? How do I create files? And, I'll tell you what I did, I went to a therapist who was like right of school, 26 or 27, and she's like immediately clicking...here's what you need here, and here's a file folder, but I mean it helped. I mean being out of the workforce when everything just exploded during

those seven years. It took off. When I left Kids First we had internal email, we did not, we weren't emailing people outside of our office (Interview with Chrissy, 2-3).

Upon Chrissy's return, she found that email, among other new media, became an integral part of her daily work. The organization had adopted new media as part of how daily work gets done. This change caused her personal anxiety and uncertainty when she returned until she was able to learn how to use it effectively in her work.

The third person I interviewed was Mark, the Communications Manager. Mark is in his early 20s and is a recent college graduate. This is his first full-time professional job after college, and he has worked at the organization for a year and a half. Mark was hired to manage the overall communications efforts for the organization, but according to Norma (the CEO) they chose him specifically because of his experience and expertise in working with new media. She knew the organization was moving in the direction of incorporating new media efforts for means of efficiency, publicity, and overall communication strategy for the organization, so they searched for someone with his specific skill set. Mark personally enjoys new media technologies and spends time seeking them out. His personal experience with using new media made him the right hire for the organization so that it could achieve its new media and communication goals.

In addition to interviewing these three people, direct observation of their website, Tweets and Facebook page were also used for data collection and analysis. This analysis provides a look at how Kids First presents itself through new media at the organizational level. The organization has 424 followers on Facebook and 638 followers on Twitter. I

looked at their posts for the month of December 2010. All of the Tweets from Kids First matched the Facebook posts. In speaking with Mark he mentioned that they post to just one site and the message then also appears on other sites such as Twitter and their website. The only difference between the two is that Facebook allowed posts to incorporate pictures. In the eight posts they had for the month (posts went through December 17, the organization had a winter break towards the end of the month), they provide several links to relevant stats and articles regarding children, poverty, and education. There also was a post with photographs from their holiday “adopt a family” event that collected toys and clothing for children in need. This post received the most likes and comments on the Kids First Facebook page (approximately 20 comments/likes). In observing their content and the conversations that I had with staff, it is apparent that Kids First sees new media as an integral component of the nonprofit business in today’s world. They use the tools available and often and in new and innovative ways. For example, a local university took note of their new media activity and offered an opportunity to partner. Partnerships like this have helped bring in approximately \$50,000 in donations to the organization.

Mark: University X, this is the other thing, um they only donated to us because we are going to promote them through social networking.

Interviewer: Wow. Now how did that work? Was it like a marketing agreement or something?

Mark: Well yeah, so we...I mean they liked what we were doing with the Twitter and the Facebook, so I mean it was almost weird because like, you know, we’re trying to say hey look what we’re doing for our clients, but they kind of

saw...look at what they're using social media to do. So they're like, we want you to promote the money on social networking, so say "hey we gave you the money."

Interviewer: So you market when they give you money?

Mark: Yeah, we can market that. Whereas with traditional media, you couldn't do that. It's like, "Universtiy X just gave us \$5000, thank you, you guys are the best." You know...or...you know actually for our breakfast event, we're going to have a Facebook booth where people can actually go check their Facebook pages or email. And we're gonna tell people to go on Facebook and tell their friends that you came to the breakfast. But it's gonna be sponsored by University X. So we'll say, go to the Univ. X Twitter booth....Twitter café is what we're calling it.

Interviewer: That's really neat. A very innovative way for a nonprofit to do things.

Mark: It's great. You know, even just having a cool website to say, hey, these are the supporters of our organization. I mean I would say we probably brought in about \$50 grand that we wouldn't have without new media.

Kids First also has a very engaging website. All of the staff mentioned that when they redesigned the page a couple of years ago, they wanted to make it fun, vibrant, and reflective of the children's organization that they are. Their website uses bright, bold colors and child-friendly images (including blocks, crayons, gold fish crackers, a hand print). At the top of the page the "what we do" tab links to an explanation of what Kids First does in the community. The "get involved" tab links to opportunities for people to learn more about the organization, adopt a family, donate money and get connected

through Twitter and Facebook. There is a “donate” tab that links to an online donation page which states that “92 cents of your dollar is spent directly on our mission” and that “over 2 million dollars in local support” must be raised to maintain their programs. The last tab at the top of the home page is a “get in touch” tab that has contact information for the organization. Additionally on the page, there is a box that hosts the Twitter feeds sent out by the organization. There also is a menu of resources that includes links to an enrollment page, parent resources, employment opportunities, press coverage, and reports for the organization (annual report, community assessment, etc.).

Kids First has made new media a priority. They strategically have used new media vehicles to share the organization’s message on social networking sites and their own home page. The result is public recognition and partnerships that greatly benefit the organization.

#### *Local Case 2: Springfield Senior Services*

The second local NPO of the study was Springfield Senior Services. Beginning in 1970, this organization assists seniors and helps them live in the least restrictive setting (preferably at home) for as long as possible. The NPO serves up to 10,000 senior citizens annually with individualized care that helps them maintain independence and safety. The organization currently employs 45 people.

I first interviewed Dennis, the President and CEO. Dennis has worked with the organization for seven years. Prior to working with Senior Services, Dennis served in the U.S. Air Force for 23 years. Dennis is helping lead the organization into greater use of new media tools. He says he uses new media constantly, “I especially keep my

Blackberry on me at all times,” he says, which keeps him connected to what is happening at work day and night.

Linda, the Director of Resource Development, was the second employee I interviewed at Springfield Senior Services. She has worked in nonprofits for over 20 years, and has been with Senior Services for two years. She says she primarily uses Facebook, Twitter and the organization’s website for new media communication with the organization’s community. She says it is great for sending instant alerts. However, while she enjoys the technology, unlike her boss, she chooses to keep it at work:

I mean I text message all the time, but I just prefer, because I am plugged in pretty much all the time when I’m at the office, and when I’m at home I’m um, you know I’m always checking my email, but if I had a blackberry or a PDA of some kind...I know that I would never have any personal time to myself.

My husband has a Blackberry and he has it on all the time. It makes me crazy (laugh). It’s a conscious decision (Interview with Linda, 1).

The third person I interviewed was Amy, the Development Associate. Amy has been with the organization for a little less than a year and has worked in a few other nonprofits in her career. Amy describes her role at Senior Services as:

One of my major responsibilities is to develop our social media, uh, as a form of networking, as a form of creating uh energy around uh initiatives, I guess including fundraising. Um, new volunteers, new um, new interested partners, uh so it’s really generating those kinds of leads and opportunities. Um, it is uh, a tool



to share news, um on what's happening internally at Senior Services and communicate our events and help promote our events (Interview with Ann, 2).

In addition to interviewing these individuals, I also directly observed their website, Tweets (there are 43 followers) and Facebook page (with 181 followers) for data collection and analysis. They had a total of 75 Tweets during the month. There were several posts that were conversational in nature such as "Time to put Christmas decorations up. Oh yeah, first day of December and we're all over that" to "I'm lovin' it." Others were informational about events taking place at Senior Services such as "Today kicks off a week of Giving Tree Deliveries and Companionship. Get involved today!" and "Over 60 volunteers from (business name) came to deliver Senior Services Holiday Project gifts and visit with seniors."

The organization's website hosts its mission statement on the home page. It also has a video link to a clip of "A day in the life of Senior Services." At the bottom of the home page, there is a link for people to click in order to make an online donation. Additionally, there is a menu bar at the top of the page that includes an "about us" tab (staff bios, financial information, volunteer and employment opportunities), a "news and events" tab (with news & media, photos, and the events calendar), and then three additional tabs that address senior issues that are labeled "independent living," "nutrition," and "transportation." During the interviews I had with the staff in July, they indicated that Fall of 2010 was when they planned to ramp up new media use. It appears as if that has happened.

Overall, it looks like Senior Services is beginning to use new media as an integral tool within the NPO, however, they still have much more potential for how they can expand the current offerings. This organization does not have someone whose job is specifically to oversee new media activity, so the activity that is posted is in addition to other staff job duties. While Facebook and Twitter are used along with their website, the information presented often does not provoke an immediate response from the receivers of the messages they send out. Much of the social media postings are conversational trivia, rather than postings that provoke action in the realms of volunteerism, fundraising, and advocacy. As the new media activity increases and gains sophistication, focusing on developing activity in these three areas will help the organization reach its goals to serve seniors in the community.

### *Local Case 3: Springfield Zoo*

The last local case study used in this research was the Springfield Zoo. This NPO aims to touch the lives of people who visit and to provide a great life for the animals that live there. Their mission is to be a leader in conservation, captive breeding and animal care. They strive to connect people with wildlife and wild places through experiences that inspire action. Their goal is that kids of all ages will have an experience of a lifetime each time they visit the zoo.

I interviewed three Springfield Zoo employees. First, I interviewed the marketing director, Jill. Jill has several of years of experience in previous PR and marketing positions and has been with the zoo for just under one year. She says she sees herself as one who brings ideas for new media use to the organization. When asked about the role she plays, she said:

I think bringing things to the table. I think it's a pretty big role. Yeah I think just being out there and knowing what's going on, and if I think it's a fit for this organization, bringing it to the bowers that be and saying, hey, this is what I think and why I think we should give it a shot (Interview with Jill, 3).

Jill sees herself as someone who is always looking out for the best uses of new media for the organization.

Next, I interviewed the Events and Social Media Manager, Lacy. Lacy was first hired to work as the assistant to the Executive Director. Shortly after she was hired, the senior staff identified her new media skills and put them to work for the organization. She was hired about a year ago when she says:

A couple months into that job, um, he (the president) and several other of our senior staff members were having a meeting about social media and social networking sort of stuff that they were talking about, not really understanding what they were talking about. Um, somewhere along the line the comment was made that they should talk to some of the younger people about how to work it (laugh). So um, the president called me in and asked me what I knew about social media things. So I just sort of went through it and talked to him about it. In my previous position I worked in an alumni office, and I did a lot of their social media, so advertising on social media. I did homecoming. So I did all the young alumni and current student giving, along with alumni events and our class officer program. So um, I just talked with him about that and what was going on there and how it could be utilized and he asked if I'd be willing to take it on...if I'd be interested in moving to the marketing department (Interview with Lacy, 1).

Lacy is the only person I interviewed throughout all of the NPOs who has a new media component as part of her official working title. Her organization strategically moved her into this role to expand new media efforts for the zoo.

Lastly, I interviewed Tonya who serves as the Vice President and oversees both of the other people interviewed. Tonya says that she does not have as much hands on interaction with new media implementation at the zoo. Tonya says, “Well to be honest with you, I’m the Vice President, so I don’t use it directly in any way. I have different departments that use the media, but I’m not directly involved in that in any way” (Interview with Tonya, 1). Tonya’s involvement with new media at the zoo is from a senior management level. She looks at the overall organizational strategy and the ways in which new media is a component of that strategy. Her most direct interaction with new media implementation at the zoo is through managing colleagues like Lacy and Jill.

In addition to interviewing professionals at the Springfield Zoo, I also observed their website, Facebook page (that had 11,523 followers at the time of this writing, an increase of over 3000 followers since interviews took place in the summer months), and Twitter page (with 792 followers). This allowed me to see how the zoo publicly used new media at the organizational level. Their website is very colorful with pictures of giraffes and the local terrain. In the top right hand corner there are three tabs, “about the zoo” with information about the zoo’s mission, press info, guest services, and FAQs; “support the zoo” with links to membership options, adopt an animal options, and the ability to make a financial donation; and “get involved” where you can get information about membership perks, volunteering, employment opportunities, and conservation information. The page also houses “animal cams” where you can view video of the

animals. There is a central graphic that rotates images of the animals. There are also tabs that run across the top of the page labeled “support the zoo,” “explore and learn,” “conservation matters,” “kids’ fun,” “animals and plants,” and “exhibitions and attractions.” At the bottom of the page in small print are links to a site map, contact information for the zoo, directions to the zoo, a Spanish version of the site, and the privacy policy and terms of use. Overall, the website has a significant amount of relevant information to assist potential zoo visitors, donors, volunteers, the media and potential employees.

Their site also has links to their Facebook page, Twitter Page, YouTube and Blog content. The zoo posts just about every day on Facebook and Twitter, and on some days two or three posts were present. The Facebook page is much more interactive, as it provides links to articles relevant to the zoo and several zoo “fans” have posted comments. Posts generally focus on happenings at the zoo or highlight activities taking place in other organizations with which the zoo is affiliated. The zoo’s YouTube channel is very robust with approximately 50 videos for people to view, each which highlights a different animal exhibit or area of the zoo. Their blog is another venue where the zoo highlights exhibits and activities taking place at the zoo. There are links to video clips and relevant websites throughout the site.

Overall, the Springfield Zoo has a robust offering of new media tools for visitors to their website (which links to Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and a blog). Of the local nonprofits I researched for this study, this organization appears to have the most invested in new media offerings. These offerings provide information about the zoo’s history, upcoming events, direct means for communicating with zoo staff, and an inside view of

the zoo with video clips and photos. This organization is also the only one that has a staff person specifically assigned to new media development and production. The investment in new media through this staff person is apparent through their offerings online.

*National-Affiliate Case 1: Caring Community*

Caring Community first opened its doors in Springfield in 1922. Although it is affiliated with a national organization, it is locally governed and operates independently to address the causes of problems in the community. The NPO strives to mobilize and grow the caring power of the community to create the best quality of life for its citizens. The organization aims to be a trusted community partner known for convening people to address health and human services needs, cultivating a culture of philanthropy by sponsoring strong programs, engaging quality staff and volunteers, making strategic investments in community issues, and effectively managing its enterprise. It currently employs 32 people.

At Caring Community, I interviewed Kim, the Marketing Director who has been with the organization for just over two years and has prior experience in marketing and communications. They currently choose not to use Twitter, so I asked her about this decision. She said:

You know, I just think for our target audience at this time, it's just not worth the effort at this point. Now, six months from now, a year from now, that may change. I have been tracking it for both businesses (she also is a small business owner). In fact I just saw an article today, why Gen "Y" is not um, using Twitter. It's so interesting because they were the early adopters of Facebook. So it's just interesting to see where it's going (Interview with Kim, 2).

As the Marketing Director, Kim plays an influential role in deciding which new media technologies are utilized and which ones are not.

I also interviewed Amy, the Development Associate who has been with the organization for two years and this is her first job after graduating from college. She says that new media encompass nearly everything she does at work:

Ok. So pretty much everything I do involves new media, if you're gonna include computers in that. Um, email, when we have servers go down, I don't know how to do anything without email connections. Um, we do a lot of our marketing through Internet, so whether it's an e-newsletter or Facebook or whatever that may be or even our signature in our emails, so we do pretty much everything that I can possibly think of through new media (Interview with Amy, 1).

Amy is a young member of the staff. She explained how new media has always been part of her professional work experience. Because of this, she often shares what she knows about new media as a younger professional with the organization. She said they frequently like her ideas and implement them into how the organization communicates with the community (such as through Facebook, online newsletters, etc.).

The third person I interviewed at Caring Community was Jane, the manager of a human resources hotline program who has been with the organization for two years and has worked in nonprofits for about ten years. The hotline provides connections to vital resources to the community (such as housing assistance, childcare assistance, help with paying utility bills, etc.). She says new media allows them to operate anywhere at any time:

Um, well because we're totally Internet-based, we can work anywhere as long as we have an internet connection. So the really great thing is that we can keep doing

our referrals and everything online. Um, and then we can keep checking email and everything from where we are.

Because of new media, Jane and her staff can help people facing critical situations such as hunger, homelessness, and need for utility assistance. She explained that everything they do to provide services in the community is reliant on new media.

Direct observation of Caring Community's Facebook page (where they have 606 fans) and website were also used for studying this case (they do not use Twitter). The Caring Community home page has prominent links on the left side of the page. The first link is an "about us" link that provides the history of the organization, how to contact the staff, financial information, media-related information, and a link to the organization's quarterly newsletter. The next link is labeled "our impact." By clicking here, one can read about the programs offered by the organization and how it impacts the community. The next link is "our partners." This link provides a list of agencies that are partnered with the Caring Community organization. The next link is labeled "take action," and it links visitors to pages that allow one to make an online donation, volunteer, or share a story. The next link, "campaign," provides multiple links that facilitate individual giving as well as corporate campaigns and their setup. Lastly, there is a link that connects site visitors to information about their human resources hotline. Here people can use the online database to find resources for things from shelter to utilities to finding childcare.

In addition to this main toolbar, there are a few other banks of links on the Caring Community website. One link allows individuals with proper credentials to log in to their intranet site that is used for staff and volunteers. There also is a box called "latest news"



where four news headlines and brief stories are listed about the organization. Next to the latest news, there is a box that houses “events and announcements.”

The website also has a link to the organization’s Facebook page (which has 606 followers). They posted most days during the observation period with a total of 28 posts. Most posts were related to things happening within the organization. There were several photos posted from their holiday party and people responded with additional posts regarding that event. There were also messages that highlighted recognitions the organization received during the month.

While the Caring Community website provides web visitors with ample information about the organization, the organization only utilizes Facebook as a social media outlet for the organization. It seems that through observation and conversations with the staff that Facebook gives the organization the greatest return on the investment of staff time that it takes to produce it. Based on the interactivity that is noted from outside participants on the page, it appears this strategy works well for the organization. The organizational activity I observed through data collection shows that it prioritizes a strong new media presence through limited channels. It focuses its efforts on a few channels with frequent activity rather than spreading itself more widely.

#### *National-Affiliate Case 2: Building Bridges*

Building Bridges is the second nationally-affiliated NPO I visited. The organization currently employs nine employees. The organization builds homes for low-income people in the community. At Building Bridges I interviewed the Development Director, Jamie, who has been with the organization since 2007 and has been working in nonprofits since 2001. She says that during the time she has been with the organization,

she has really seen new media change how both the individual employees and the organization as a whole interact with the community:

I guess I just really feel like it's putting us in the face of, it's like changing the relationship I feel like we have with donors. It's not just kind of like a to do list, like globally, or organization-wide, I just feel like we're connecting um, with people in ways that we weren't before, and I feel like there will always be a section of folks in our database that want the paper newsletters, that um don't want to get, they don't have email addresses or don't care. It's just...so we're still reaching them, but I think it's just opening us up a lot more (Interview with Jamie, 2).

I also interviewed Jori, the Development Associate who recently graduated from college and has prior experience working in PR, event planning and media relations and uses this background for incorporating new media at Building Bridges. She oversees most of the social media activity for the organization. She says she tries to post messages to the public daily, and e-newsletters, Facebook and Twitter are the new media tools she uses most:

We do an e-newsletter to all of our constituents and also I manage our Twitter account, which was something I pretty much started when I came in early October of last year. Our Twitter and Facebook are synced, so I generally update...I try to update once a day, but only if it's kind of newsworthy (Interview with Jori, 1).

The third person I interviewed was the Volunteer Manager, Kelly. Kelly has worked with Building Bridges for two years and oversees all volunteer activities and recruitment. She says she finds Facebook particularly helpful in her role:

I use our Facebook account a lot. Mostly I use it for connecting with our volunteers, since I'm a volunteer manager. Um we post pictures of events that we are having, we have just pictures of us on the construction site, and many of our volunteers are on Facebook, so tagging them, other people can see what we have a going on, and it's a great way just to get involved as well (Interview with Kelly,

1).

Building Bridges has a website that I observed as part of my direct observation of its new media activity. Of the websites I viewed, this one is very clearly laid out with little clutter. There is a white background, which makes the text and images on the page easy to read. Rather than numerous links on the page, this page has six links across the top of the page: current projects, volunteer, give, own a home, a link to their home building store, and an about us link. On the left side of the page there are picture icons with additional links (some are repeats of what is in the top toolbar). These links include one for giving, one for their home building store, current projects, the organization's impact, and the organization's newsletters. In the center of the page, the organization lists what is going on for the week within the organization. They also provide a link to follow the organization via Twitter and Facebook at the bottom of the page (although the Facebook link does not work).

They also utilize Facebook (which has 358 followers) and Twitter page (which has 289 followers). They posted 12 times on Facebook during the month of December and only seven times on Twitter. Some of the posts are exact copies of one another. The Facebook posts, however, make use of the additional features available via Facebook, such as photos. Outside fans also posted to the Facebook site and made comments.

While Building Bridges does have staff people who strategically implement new media into their regular job functions, the staff said it is challenging to accomplish all they would like to accomplish with new media because of the other demands on their time. Because the organization has such a small staff, everyone tends to play several roles within the organization, thus leaving less time to spend exclusively on new media. The

senior management is very supportive of new media use on behalf of the organization, so it appears that staff members enjoy a fairly open opportunity for growing their new media offerings. Despite the limitations on how much time the staff can invest in new media activity, the organization has seen benefits from new media, especially for recruiting volunteers and event attendees.

*National-Affiliate Case 3: Christian Compassion*

The staff interviewed at Christian Compassion included Mitch, the Vice President of Institutional Advancement and Chief Development Officer. Mitch has worked with Christian Compassion since April of 2009. Mitch oversees several operations with the organization including new media production. He has a Ph.D. and has authored several books. When asked about his involvement with new media at the organization, he says he played an integral role in bringing new media to the organization:

I was, I'm the one who moved us in that direction. Uh, completely redid our web presence so we redid our homepage and um, tried to make it easier for a donor to go on and make a donation, so donations process far more easily through that. I should get the stats on that...um, our donations on online have quadrupled in a year. So I've been here a little over a year, and I started getting us involved in social media, social networking, um, about, yeah, it would be a year now. Even though I've been here a little over a year. Let's see...this is...this is kind of what I used to, not my material, but I put together new media seminars so that I could meet with all of the various managers throughout the organization and get them interested in all the terminology, definitions, and help them to appreciate that, you know, there is a lot more than just Facebook. You know, people think Facebook,

but the social media matrix as you can see, I mean it's extensive, and I mean it's even larger than that (Interview with Mitch, 2).

I also interviewed Seth. Seth is the Vice President of Poverty Reduction and oversees several of the operations that serve the homeless population, including the organization's soup kitchen. Seth says he uses new media often and tries to make it as personable as possible:

I, yeah, I get feedback both on Facebook and through emails, whenever I send out an, there's an event coming up, do you want to be part of it or, if you want to be part of this donate here, if you want to participate, go here. And I send those links and I make sure it's as easy as possible and I learned this in my last job, but it really does work to bring people in. And I don't want to send out a canned approach, um, kind of the letter that I would send to everyone, but you know e-blasts I'll do that, but I'll make it sound like me. And um, one of the things that I do when I whenever I send an email is that I read it out loud to myself so I hear my voice. And I don't, you know, someone doesn't have to translate what I'm saying. They hear what I'm attempting to get across to them (Interview with Seth, 1).

Lastly, I interviewed Rachel, the Director of Communications. Rachel has been with the organization for five years and oversees all communications programs, literature, press and fund-raising events. At this time she does not directly oversee the new media operations (Mitch currently does that until she can "take some things off her plate" to be

more involved in this area). Rachel has a background in advertising in which she previously worked for one of the major national advertising firms in the U.S. Although she does not directly oversee new media operations, she is observing how new media are helping the organization's communication efforts:

So what we're finding is that the social media is really allowing us to get out there and really have more meaningful communications with people on a one-on-one basis. You know, you have the website and the website communicates, but you know, for the most part it's not all that interactive. I mean you can go in and you can find the information you want but, it's not a conversation. So with Facebook you can have a conversation, you can read what people are saying about the things that you're doing. We have our own Facebook page as well and we do the same thing. A lot of times what we'll do is we'll pull off things that we have on our home page, on our website and put it on Facebook, um, because it gets a different audience (Interview with Rachel, 1).

In observing this organization's new media products, I viewed their website, Tweets (where there are 359 followers), and Facebook page (where there are 335 followers). On the organization's website, the top toolbar provide links to "what we do," "who we are," "ways to help," "calendar," "news," and "contact us." There is also a small link to "jobs" beneath the top toolbar. There is a large button beneath the toolbar that says "Donate." Next to the donate icon, there is a box with revolving images that has inspirational quotes. In the center of the page there is a list of dates for relevant events and deadlines posted. To the left of this list is a box that appears to be the place for the

page's current feature story. The current story features a new campaign that is kicking off regarding women and pregnancy.

The bottom half of the page has a red background. It hosts a list of blogs that are posted by the organization's staff. It also has a list of events for the months of December and January. Also in this bottom portion of the page, there is an area that says, "connect with us" and provides links to social media icons. While the website links to Twitter, the most recent Tweet was posted on June 9, 2010. Twitter apparently is not a new media tool used frequently by the organization. On their Facebook page they have nine posts for the month of December 2010. Again, there was not a high level of activity, but they are utilizing the resource on at least a weekly basis. On this page, they highlight several relevant links to issues or stories posted on other websites. Several of the posts spurred comments from Christian Compassion Facebook fans.

This organization's website provides the basic information that anyone would need when searching a website. However, their links to social media pages lead searchers to somewhat of a dead end, since some of these tools are rarely utilized. In discussions with staff at this organization, it appears that much of their resources have been put into other forms of new media (such as internal software and databases), and the online new media areas are still growing.

#### *National-Affiliate Case 4: Spirit, Mind, Body*

At Spirit, Mind, Body I interviewed three people. The first person was Christie, the Director of Development. She has worked with this organization for several years, including spending time working for another branch in a different city. She has management responsibilities within the organization in Springfield (including playing a

role in the various citywide branches of the organization). With her management influence, she also influences decisions made with new media use. The second person I interviewed was Anthony. Anthony is the Executive Director of a branch of Spirit, Mind, Body within Springfield. He oversees all of its daily operations and activities, but works under the umbrella of the Springfield Spirit, Mind, Body NPO. The third person I interviewed was Kevin who is the Teen Director for a branch of Spirit, Mind, Body in Springfield. He incorporates new media into many of the activities that the teens participate in at the branch. He also is personally very interested in new media and previously worked as a computer technician in college. He says he self-taught himself much of what he knows about new media and brings this knowledge to his current job.

To view the new media resources publicly available at this organization, I viewed their website, Tweets, and Facebook page. First of all, the organization just launched a new website. It has a plain white background, making the black font easier to read. However, there is so much content on the page that the font is very small. The page is all text except for one picture of people standing in the upper right hand corner and the organization's logo in the left hand corner. Because there is so much text on the page, it would be too much to summarize in one paragraph. To give the overall sense of what it encompasses, there are links to membership, programs, jobs, events, online payments, contact information, the site map, local branches of the organization, the organization's history and mission, media resources, and links to online social media forums (Twitter and Facebook). When viewing the organization's Tweets for December, they posted 11 times throughout the month. The Tweets gave information about events taking place at the organization, early closures at some branches, and several inspirational quotes. There



also was a Tweet that encouraged financial gifts on December 31 as an incentive for an additional tax deduction for the year. The organization's Facebook page has very little for public view. It has some basic information about the organization and a list of their current friends. I sent a request to become a friend of the organization, but at the time of publication this had not been granted. This appears to be another example of the organization controlling new media access. They must confirm "friends" rather than allowing the public to automatically become "fans" of the organization.

In general, it appears that there are great controls over new media use at Spirit, Mind, Body. As a result of the central controls for the organization, staff at the individual branches of the organization are very frustrated by their inability to utilize new media (especially social media) to benefit the activities at their branch. It appears that the current protocol for web-based new media activity is inefficient and prohibits the organization's staff from being able to most effectively carry out their job duties.

To conclude, in this section, individual interviews guided the individual case analysis through self-reports of new media uses within the NPOs. Employees shared their new media interactions as they are experienced, thus providing data for individual-level explanations analysis for each organization. The direct observation process allowed me to conduct organizational-level analysis which allowed me to see first-hand the ways in which these NPOs are publicly promoting themselves through new media use. The next section looks into themes that emerged across cases through a cross-case analysis.

#### *Cross-Case Analysis*

As I spoke with individuals at the NPOs involved in this study, several themes emerged. These themes help provide insight into the new media experiences at two

different levels within the NPO. First, from employee self-reports we learn more about new media uses and experiences at the individual level. Second, these same self-reports provide insight into how new media adoption influences the overall organization, thus providing data for organizational-level analysis. Online observations of publicly accessible new media activity (such as Facebook, Twitter, and organizational websites) also provided data for organizational-level analysis. These data helped produce answers for the two RQs of this study.

### *Research Question One*

Research question one asked how are new media introduced and incorporated into the work of NPOs and their employees in Springfield? To answer this question, participants reflected on their own experiences with new media as they were introduced to them in the workplace. Diffusion of innovations theory (Rogers 1995), serves as the theoretical guide for this question. In addition to having the individuals speak to the adoption of new media at the organization, workers were asked about how the adoption of new media influences their personal work experience and the organization as a whole. From their responses emerged several themes across the cases that were evaluated. The following is an analysis of the themes.

#### *Theme 1: Individual employees are influential in new media adoption in the workplace*

Throughout the discussions I had with NPO professionals, I observed a trend that individual staff members within the organization were often the main force spearheading new media adoption and use. In most cases, this was a young professional in their 20's or 30's for whom new media are tools they have always incorporated into their work. They were early adopters who either brought new media to or expanded new media uses within

the NPOs in which they work. These were also the people producing the online content that I observed through the direct observation process. At Kids First, Mark has worked in his current job for about a year and a half, and it is his first full-time job post-college. He was hired to serve in the role of Communications Manager, and he was hired because of his familiarity with new media and the value that his skills brought to the position.

I had worked at places that did it previously, so they hired me and pretty much said, okay, now bring it here. I mean, I was hired to do all the communications and all the marketing. I think, but, the only reason I was really hired I think...me specifically...was because they had a humongous need for incorporating technology, whereas, if I didn't have that background, I would not have gotten the job (Interview with Mark, 2-3).

Mark is an early adopter of many new media technologies, especially social media (such as Facebook, Twitter, Weebly.com).

Kevin at Spirit, Mind, Body, is also an early adopter of several new media products such as the iPhone, Google applications, and Skype. He said he definitely brought what he knew about new media to his job:

Well, my background...I was a computer tech for um, all through college. But, so when I was going through college, I was just kind of a self-taught computer technician for four years. I was a computer tech for one of the stores there in (city name) and, you know, so I kind of grew up with it. Every job I've had I've brought a little bit of an innovative touch to everything. Every time, it didn't matter what job it was, I've always been looking at ways to add technology to

improve what we were doing whether that was turning something that was a paper trail into a spreadsheet or into a web page that everybody could access or something that's on a commonly mapped drive that everybody could access or something like that that could just make things more efficient (Interview with Kevin, 2).

Kevin is an avid user of mobile technology and uses Skype to make calls both from his computer and his iPhone. He has been trying to get his NPO to adopt Skype as a means of efficiency. "I've been trying to get our assn. to move forward with using Skype, because we get so many...we do a lot of conference calls and we do a lot of long distance calling, so I was trying to get them moving forward using Skype" (Interview with Kevin, 4).

Kevin works with children at Spirit, Mind, Body, mostly after school. They use new media for projects, homework, and creative exercises. He uses his knowledge of new media to encourage the students to take their technological knowledge and skills outside of the classroom. Kevin says:

As far as what I've incorporated into my work, I've taken pieces of the organization out of the building. So we have, um, family events, like we'll have a sock hop or a luau or something that's geared toward families, and we'll bring the kids who have the knowledge and the experience with the digital cameras and the video equipment and whatever and they'll come out and they'll come to the event, and they'll snap pictures and we'll put up green screens at the events where people can pose in front of the green screens and then they'll get Photoshopped on

to like a surfboard, and then we email them the pictures. Um, you know, a lot of the kids have volunteered to do photography at the events, do photography just throughout Spirit, Mind, Body when there's certain things going on.

Kevin is a young member of the staff at his NPO. Amy is also like Kevin and Mark. She is a young staff member at Caring Community. This is also her first job out of college, and since she began she has been focusing on bringing the organization up to speed with its new media practices:

It kind of evolved, like I said, I've been here two years. This is my first professional job. I worked retail before. And so with my age, I think, um, I'm one of the youngest people on the staff and I think that the technology just kind of came with me. It's very easy for me to understand how to do it. And I, you know, do that at home. And so especially the Facebook, the LinkedIn, the video that we made for YouTube, that all sort of came from events that I had helped with or came up with and so I wasn't hired on to do this job at all, it just kind of evolved. Um, as time has gone on, it has become more apparent to the organization that we need to do something new and so this new media has absolutely helped us, um, reach more people or establish better relationships with people that we already have relationships with (Interview with Amy, 1).

But not everyone comes to NPO employment with experience or a passion for new media use. Jamie at Building Bridges is influential in promoting new media use at her organization. She says that for colleagues who are not experienced in using new media, sometimes all her co-workers need to get started with using new media is just a little encouragement and guidance:

I think when we tell our colleagues about that (new media use), they are like, "Oh I think that's something I could do." I mean when you think it's something so small like 140 characters you cannot, I mean you can't go wrong. Those things I kind of think they're maybe a little bit shy to dip their toe in the water even. And

just this morning I was at this local nonprofit thing and we were talking about social media and it's kind of fun to swap stories like that. And I think one of the first things, I think it was at some women's chamber thing where I was influenced and I learned about Twitter. So it's just...it really I think is just kind of helping them get over that fear just by talking about it with other nonprofit folks and colleagues a lot (Interview with Jamie, 5-6).

At the Springfield Zoo, Lacy's job description includes using and developing new media that will influence the organization and help it achieve its mission and goals. However, even though the zoo is very forward thinking in terms of new media adoption and implementation, Lacy often has to battle with more traditional employees who are less trusting of adopting new media. Lacy at the Springfield Zoo says:

I think that within the organization, I'm fighting the battle every day as to why I think what we're doing is great. Like in the Springfield Business Journal, we just got runner up for having the best Facebook page. We're getting recognized, people come up to me and ask how we're doing what we're doing and if they can see what we're doing at the zoo because they see us a leader in the forum. So I think that's really good. I think that's great. We're having an impact. I came to this position at the end of February, and since then we've increased our fan base, our followers on Facebook from 1000 followers to eight thousand followers. And we're out there partnering with people and getting people excited and doing giveaways, and a plethora of different things getting us out there in the social media realm. I feel like sometimes what I do here, our higher ups are a little more

old school, so I feel like I have to explain everything...like why are we doing this or what are you doing, or how much time are you spending on this. So I'm constantly defending what we're doing. They want to see a return on investment. They don't get it when I say our follower base has increased by seven thousand people over the past six months. That means nothing to them. They're like, I don't get it. So that for me is sometimes an uphill battle (laugh). I mean those people are now sharing with their friends. Um, they want me to prove that people are showing up at the gates because of our social media efforts, which you can't...I mean that's not how it works. Um so now we're trying to think of ways prove return on investment (Interview with Lacy, 4).

Staff members also influence new media adoption well beyond just social media capabilities. Christie, the Director of Development at Spirit, Mind, Body says new media can help with fundraising and keeping things organized with the organization as a whole. She currently is leading the charge to find new software that will help to keep things running smoothly. In her search for the perfect fit, she finds that her organization may not have the new media tools they need to make things work.

Right now I'm kind of part of leading the charge for introducing some new software or evaluating what our needs are and going through a needs assessment. And it's software that we would not only use for the fundraising side, but also the membership side of things and allow online giving to integrate with that. And include our childcare and sports programming...to be a lot more all encompassing that what we're using right now. Part of what we're finding is that, you know,

when you talk to a lot of people, these software companies, they're prepared to talk to you about um, social media, how that interacts with online giving....and that's stuff where we don't even know the right questions to ask. You know, we nod our heads when they're saying this stuff, it sounds great. But we find that...we don't even know if we would have the staff that would be able to lead that charge at this stage (Interview with Christie, 3).

While most of the NPOs I spoke with had young people promoting new media adoption, at Christian Compassion one of the Vice Presidents who is in his late 50s oversees this activity. Mitch explained that when he joined the organization, he led it to new media adoption in several ways. He says it has paid off dividends:

I'm the one who moved us in that direction. Uh, completely redid our web presence, so we redid our homepage and um, tried to make it easier for a donor to go on and make a donation, so donations process far more easily through that...our donations online have quadrupled in a year. I've been hear a little over a year, and I started getting us involved in social media, social networking, um, about, yeah it would be a year now. I put together new media seminars so that I could meet with all the various managers and get them interested in the terminology, definitions, and help them to appreciate that. You know...there is a lot more than Facebook (Mitch, 2).

Across the NPOs that I visited, one individual usually held the key to moving new media practices forward. With few exceptions such as Mitch, a young person (in their



20's or early 30's) spearheaded the charge. This observation ties into both the individual and the organizational uses of new media. Individuals bring new media knowledge, skill, experience and passion to the organization. They train and teach co-workers how to use these tools. As a result, they influence the spread of new media adoption within the organization as a whole. Regardless of age, individuals have great influencing power in new media adoption within all of the NPOs that I visited.

*Theme 2: NPOs experience some level of uncertainty with new media adoption*

As previously discussed, diffusion of innovations theory deals with a specific type of communication that deals with something new, and with something new comes a certain level of uncertainty (Rogers, 1995). That certainly is the case with new media adoption with individuals and organizations, including the nonprofit employees with whom I spoke for this study. Every organization went through some period of uncertainty with new media adoption. In particular, people were uncertain of what kind of power new media might have and the overall implications they could have on the workplace. They also worried about investing dollars (either on equipment or paid staff time) in technology that might not be beneficial to the organization. These uncertainties were described by several of the participants in this study.

For example, Jill, the Marketing Director at Springfield Zoo said at first they were not sure if the zoo's community would care about their presence in new media forums. She said they just had to start using the new media tools to find their value. She said, "yeah, I mean I guess it was a slow start, and once we started to see that people wanted to see things on Facebook, the more we would use it. You know people we thought would benefit from it, so we used it" (Interview with Jill, 5).

Norma at Kids First said that at one staff meeting she told her employees that Facebook was not allowed during business hours, then after some thought she changed her tune at the next staff meeting and has been pleased with the outcomes.

So, we were um after having told our staff in one general staff meeting that I thought spending time on Facebook during work hours was inappropriate, and then turned around the next meeting (laugh) after uh, having received a bunch of feedback about why that wasn't necessarily inappropriate, and we did uh a survey, and ultimately decided it was very appropriate and somewhat helpful for staff to be in tune with what was going on in the Facebook realm (Interview with Norma, 3).

And while NPOs that are earlier to adopt new media tend to enjoy its benefits, not all NPOs are willing to entrust employees with new media freedom. For a few of the employees I spoke to (who work at Spirit, Mind, Body), new media advances are largely locked down by high level management. They serve as gatekeepers for new media advances, which makes the work situation quite challenging:

Our association has one Facebook page for the association, but they won't let us have one for each branch. So it's ultimately ineffective because people can join and be friends with the Springfield association, but they can't be friends with each individual branch, and so everybody has so much that is offered differently because of the autonomy of every branch of (the organization), that it really serves no purpose. There are seven branches with one Facebook. It's basically a five step process, and it's...by the time it actually gets posted I don't know, it just

doesn't seem...that's my biggest uh, concern with technology being in a company is that they sit on things for so long (Interview with Kevin, 4).

Because the marketing department holds the keys to new media communication, it is a very inefficient and ineffective approach for the staff. This was apparent through the direct observation of their web activity, as it was less utilized than NPOs that were more advanced in the social media adoption process. Text messaging is another technology that staff are forbidden to use. One person I spoke with said she uses her personal phone to get around this.

We're a fairly big organization, but um, we have some strong restrictions on what we're allowed to do. We're not even allowed to text on our work phone, which is the way that people are communicating. So a lot of people, like myself, I have an unlimited plan on my personal phone, so I'll often times share my personal phone number with them as well, depending on the situation, because some people will communicate. You know, I'm in a meeting, I can't pick up the phone and talk, so I'm gonna text you what I need (Interview with Christie, 2).

One individual explained how texting was used prior to it being banned within his organization. Once texting was banned, it became a major setback.

When we were able to text message, uh, you could see a lot more community buy in because there were a lot more people here. Uh, when we, you know, a lot of times we would send a text to a kid and the parents would be with them and they

would all come to the center together for our event. So I was seeing a big impact that way (Interview with Kevin, 7).

Now that texting is banned, Kevin is seeing fewer people arrive for events. He says kids do not plan in advance, and therefore sending an instant text message was a very effective means for drawing in a group for an activity at his branch of Spirit, Mind, Body.

Based on my conversations, it appears that new media use and adoption creates some level of uncertainty through the adoption process. This primarily manifests itself at the organizational level (although key senior individuals are the ones establishing policies adopted by the organization). Once an organization chooses to use new media and sees their benefits, employees I spoke with shared enthusiasm and excitement for using these technologies. However, for those who are heavily monitored and restricted from using them, a great sense of distrust, frustration, and inefficiency seems to fester among employees within the NPO.

*Theme 3: Incorporation of new media increases the pace of getting work done within the NPO*

One thing that everyone I spoke with agrees upon is that adoption of new media has changed the way work is done within NPOs today. Through direct observation of web activity, one can see that Facebook activity and Tweets take place at virtually any moment of the day. Something that was said over and over again was that the pace of work is faster and never ending. Chrissy from Kids First said it was really quite a change to come back to work after a few years off:

Everything's faster. There's more work. More work. It's quicker, it's faster, people expect things immediately, and if you have a meeting with someone, you'd better sure as heck get back to the office and create whatever it is she said she wanted to do. Next year we're going back to providing services in a school district we used to serve, but haven't recently. And we have been away for a couple of years, and so, what I was used to, you would have had this meeting, you would have gotten back, and designed a brochure, you would have sent it off to the printer and gotten it back. We had to get back and get something done immediately, get it on our website, the contract was finalized. You know, do we have a link to the district's site on our website? You know what collateral is accessible from the website that we need to change??? Um, and it, and it needed to happen right away. We didn't have a week, so there's a lot more happening, that it, it's the pace of what's gonna happen (Interview with Chrissy, 9).

Chrissy's experience demonstrates that an overall organizational change has taken place with the incorporation of new media. Work must be completed much faster than it was completed just years ago when new media was not yet a standard component of how work gets done. This organizational change increases individual employee workload and stress. More productivity is expected in shorter timeframes.

Mitch at Christian Compassion sees the same need for speed within his organization. He says, "It's more about accessibility, speed, and it never ends. It's constant updating, which is why you have to add a consultant... somebody who

understands the technology, um, it's it was always interesting to me" (Interview with Mitch, 7).

Mitch says they hired an outside consultant to make sure they adopting the appropriate new media offerings and using them as effectively as possible. He said ultimately new media tools have to contribute to the bottom line, or else there is no point in investing in them. As a result, periodically the organization checks in with a consultant to make sure they are on track.

Rachel also from Christian Compassion, sees how new media adoption has changed the pace of getting work done over the years. Rachel has been in the work force since the 80's, so during that time staffing patterns have been greatly changed due to new media introductions.

When I first started in New York, there was a computer station for computers and everybody kind of started slowly going and figuring out how beneficial this was, and then within about three years everybody had a computer on their desk. So, you know things changed dramatically...that was in 84, 85, 86. So obviously the most direct effect it has is for your administrative staff. Because now everyone's doing their own letters, they're doing their own charts and graphs and documents and you're not having to write it out and then hand it to your secretary to type up. So it truly, um, from that perspective just the use of computers really changed the way people work...almost everything I do it's on a computer, you know. So if you think back, just the introduction of technology has dramatically revolutionized how people work (Interview with Rachel, 1-2).

During her tenure, she also has seen the fast pace that comes with new media deteriorate the quality and accuracy of work that is being done.

You know another thing that's huge is um, you know when I started in advertising in NY, you overnighted everything. You know, you worked on these documents and then you typed them out and then you proofed 'em and then you typed 'em again and used correction tape and all that sort of stuff, and then you overnighted things. Then fax became big, so then your clients are like, can you fax that to me? And then email got really big. And now it's "can you send that to me immediately?" You know, so it's also changed expectations in the work force, because, whereas before you could buy yourself a little time and double check things, we live in such a fast paced society, which I don't think is necessarily a good thing, because I think your work becomes more...has more mistakes, because you're working at such a fast pace that you don't actually have the time to go back and do the type of research or proofing, or double checking that if you know you have the time (you could do it). (Interview with Rachel, 1).

Rachel sees that NPO professionals must work at a faster pace because of today's increased demands for a quick turnaround. As a result, some professionals get sloppy. Professionals simply do not have the same kind of time to dedicate to quality as they did prior to new media. The pressures placed on individual employees are taking its toll on the quality of work produced by many organizations.

Not only does the adoption of new media mean that individuals are responsible for producing more on their own at a quicker pace, it also means that work is done around

the clock. Dennis at Serving Seniors stays connected to the office at all hours of the day and night.

Now that I have a Blackberry with me, it's like it's with me all the time. I mean, I have it on all day so I can keep up with emails. I even check it at night, like if I get up to go to the bathroom at 1 a.m. I'll look at it to see if I need to reply to something. If it's something urgent, I sometimes will just reply to check it off my list. It keeps the work going 24/7. That is a definite change (Interview with Dennis, 3).

Norma found that for many of her staff members, they too keep mobile new media devices in hand around the clock.

Norma: I said, you know, how many of you believe that your cell phone is um, you know, and appendage basically. That you know, you sleep with it. How many of you sleep with it. And you know, there were folks of a certain generation, that are looking around, my generation looking around going you have got to be kidding. But there's a number of people sitting in that room that sleep with their cell phone.

Interviewer: Yeah, because if you don't have a landline phone, and I keep mine by my bed, because if someone had an emergency in the middle of the night, that's the only way they could reach me.

Norma: Um hmm. Yeah, but um, I , I'm not necessarily sure that that's the reason that a lot of these folks are, are um truly sleeping with their cell phone.

Interviewer: I wonder why? So they can keep up with FB updates? Or...



Norma: That...they um, they just can't imagine going anywhere without it. I think the only place that most of them go without it anymore is the shower (Interview with Norma, 5).

More and more it is expected that communication can take place at all hours of the day through new media channels such as email. This organizational trend is causing personal impacts on people like Dennis and Norma's staff. While Dennis did not mention that checking his email in the middle of the night is a problem, it certainly does reflect a new pattern of work entering the personal space of one's bedroom or bathroom in the middle of the night on a frequent basis. Prior to new media, this did not happen unless a rare emergency phone call was placed to someone who would need to be notified of the situation. Now, emails can and are sent at all hours of the day. This organizational change is manifesting itself in personal space.

Because new media keep both professional and personal communication accessible virtually around the clock, some NPOs have to implement usage restrictions. Norma described how Kids First restricts cell phone usage by teachers in her classrooms. While new media is embraced in most places within her organization, restrictions remain for the teachers.

And in our classroom, again, um, because um, because we only have kiddos three and a half hours a day, almost across the board, four days a week, um we, we really need full engagement of our staff. Um, when we have kiddos there. And um, so you know, we've had to go so far as to say, you know, your cell phones need to be put away. I mean, they, they need to be in a purse or wherever it is that

you have them, and um, put away. And when kids are there, um, you know, being on your cell phone is not acceptable. And, and I finally got that across to staff by basically saying, you know, a lot of you have kids. How would you feel if their teacher was, um, texting back and forth during the day, while, you know your kids were in the classroom. How would you feel about that? And then all of the sudden it's like, oh yeah, I get it now. But um, they couldn't get themselves out of their own personal patterns, needs, desires, wishes, whatever, and um, and put it in the context of yeah, but you're this kids teacher, and so picture that as your kid, and your kid's teacher doing what you think is perfectly acceptable to do (Interview with Norma, 3).

Making new media rules and regulations within the organization is certainly a new way of doing things since the time she came to the organization nearly two decades ago. She, like all NPO employees, has to make adjustments in organizational policy to govern the personal and professional uses of new media devices at the workplace.

*Theme 4: Adoption of new media makes NPOs more efficient*

Another theme that repeated in several of the interviews I conducted was how new media help increase efficiencies for the NPOs at the organizational level. One way this is done is by saving money. Several of the people with whom I spoke mentioned the cost savings associated with e-newsletters and other forms of digital communication as opposed to hard copy postal mail newsletters and publications:

I don't think, I don't think paper's completely going away, but it was such a cost savings, and we said we can put that money back into the zoo. Versus paper, of

which we don't even know if you're reading. At least with electronic email we can kind of monitor open rates and kind of see who's taking a peak at it. Keep things current, not regurgitate old news. It just seemed like the right thing to do. But, you're, you have to look at your audience. And we definitely have a young audience and we definitely have um, and older audience as well. We cover A-Z. We don't try to alienate as we're trying to be you know, more on top of things, we don't want to alienate a good person...one of our constituents, so that's the balance (Interview with Jill, 2).

Jill sees not only a cost savings by getting rid of paper newsletters, but also a gain in knowledge about who is reading their outputs sent via new media methods (email, text, Facebook and Twitter). Amy at Caring Community experiences similar benefits from using email instead of postal mail.

Um, obviously it (new media) moves things from paper to electronic. So, you save on printing costs, you save on postage, you save on all sorts of environmental issues, and it puts it online. And so it's easy, because anybody who we have an email address for, we can send it. It helps us track like I mentioned before...who opens it, if it bounces, so we know who we need to get updated email addresses from, so it helps us keep our database up to date (Interview with Amy, 1).

Norma as CEO at Kids First sees new media as a means of efficiency and cost savings to her organization:

Because we could be much more efficient, we could move away from the very expensive paper sorts of things, we could invest in being much more, well, overall efficient. So we hired a software developer who has done many things. We actually added a second software developer a couple years ago, and um, their job

is to keep ahead of, wherever possible, the needs of the organization. We're peddling sort of fast now, because once people in the organization figured out what technology could do, and stop being afraid of their computer, and you know the pain in the neck of having to learn a new piece of software or something of that sort, um, then they were like "Let's do this." And these are all really great ideas, they're exceptionally great ideas, but now we're, you now it's like...the list is this long of things we want to do, that will continue to make us more efficient (Interview with Norma, 5).

Linda, the Director of Resource Development at Serving Seniors says that their website helps with fundraising efforts by saving money and keeping the organization's message current and accessible. She said as things evolved, the website was the first priority and remains a top priority for new media communication:

Gosh, our website was absolutely first. And um, you know, I've only been with Serving Seniors now for two years, but with every organization I've been with, it's been um, email and the Internet started once um, people started having web pages, I knew that it was absolutely one of the best ways to access people and to provide information about your organization. When you're working in development arena, to be able to have a snapshot of who you are as an organization on any given day...because it changes...is um, a lot more cost effective than to spend money on resource documents or fliers or brochures...which we still use, but you can change things on a website much quicker. And um, as soon as I realized that there were new media technologies

that we could use, we definitely incorporated that. And we're in the transition phase with our web page right now. It um is a work in progress (Interview with Linda, 1).

Seth at Christian Compassion also sees increased efficiencies in tracking the hundreds of people who are served through the charity's various programs. The reports that he can now generate provide data that was inconceivable when he worked with the organization in 1995.

Let me go back historically when I was hired here in 95. I worked here from 95-2001. We didn't even have a computer in the building. Not one. And in about 2000 they brought in a PC and used it for word processing basically. No emails, no nothing. We didn't have an internal system and...it was very old school. Secretaries did all that kind of stuff, or administrative assistants, which we call them now. Um, but that's how it was done. It was VERY old school. But what happened was, the world evolved and we grew here, and now we have reports that are, you know we can set automatic reports, we're building a system to update our data capturability for this department that I run and eventually it will capture data for the entire agency, including donor constituents, not just client constituents and volunteers. But everything, and it will give monthly reports, live reports, and annual reports. Um, so that's what we're designing now (Seth, 1).

Adoption of new media has helped NPOs to achieve greater efficiencies in terms of time and cost savings. The NPO professionals I spoke with say this is especially

important for a nonprofit organization, since money always seems to be tight. Any savings that new media can provide is a welcome change.

*Theme 5: New media adoption among nationally-affiliated NPOs is influenced by their umbrella organization*

As I spoke with NPO employees, it became apparent that those affiliated with a national organization frequently found great benefits in the new media resources the affiliation provides. At Building Bridges, several of these resources were described:

I think it makes for interesting tweets because we do get media, international information from them, um, that I think is neat to share. And we have a...the international organization has an internal intranet. And all affiliates can access it.

There's tons of message boards and you can kind of customize your page for what you need. I get tons of grant information from them and it's really neat. We do webinars and things. We can bounce ideas off of each other all of the time (Interview with Jori, 4).

There's tons of resources, but there's little oversight, because they recognize that building homes in Orange County, California is different than in Abilene, Texas. So they really provide great resources without a ton of regulations...so they would never say you've got to be on Facebook or something like that (Interview with Jamie, 3).

Employees at Caring Community experience similar benefits:

Amy: Well, constant contact is a website that helps us organize newsletters, surveys, polls, contacts, things like that. And that is a new website. I've never heard of it before, and I had no idea what it was. But that has been amazing. I have ideas of ways that it could be better for us, but with what it offers it's very convenient...and so it's easy, because anybody who we have an email address for, we can send it. It helps us track like I mentioned before...who opens it, if it bounces, so we know who we need to get updated email addresses from, so it helps us keep our database up to date. So it helps in a lot of different ways.

Interviewer: So...how did the new technology get here? How did you or the organization find out about the particular new media you chose to use in your work?

Amy: Caring Community Worldwide is obviously our higher up, um and they worked with constant contact. They made deals so that we don't have to pay any yearly fees. And so all of the local Caring Community organizations have access to one account for constant contact. So, Caring Community Worldwide told us, and we explored it, played around to see what we could do. And then once we figured out what we could do, we tried to pull in volunteering and leaders in giving. We pulled in all of these different areas that could make use of our website. So it really allowed us to send more messages more frequently, to a more targeted audience. You can select one group to contact, or several groups to contact, so it's really helped us to communicate more effectively

And while generally a national affiliation provides enhanced resources and benefits to member organizations, sometimes the name can be a drawback in certain scenarios as found at Christian Compassion. Rachel says that sometimes having a religious affiliation can cloud people's view of what they do locally.

You know we are unique in that sense that we are called Christian Compassion.

It's a double-edged sword. Some who are staunchly Christian love that, and then

other people don't want to know about your organization because it's Christian.

So for those people it's very difficult to break through that initial, "It's Christian."

Like the soup kitchen we run. I mean I can't tell you how many people...I've

been here five years...people still don't know we run the soup kitchen and they

volunteer there all the time. And so I think as a nonprofit, specifically for us with

our name that can be positive or negative, you have to constantly look for the

opportunities and make the effort to be there to educate people about what you do, so they're not turned off before you have the opportunity to turn them on.

And so Rachel and her staff try to spread the word using the tools they have, including new media resources. However, because of their religious affiliation, sometimes this could prevent someone from wanting to publicly be connected to them through forums such as Facebook. Because of the public nature of Facebook, one may think twice before wearing a religious affiliation "on their sleeve" or their Facebook profile. Christian Compassion still benefits like other nationally-affiliated NPOs through resources provided, however they have to work extra hard to make sure local individuals know the mission and services of the organization.

Local NPOs benefit from their affiliation with a national NPO name and the new media resources it provides. This mostly represents an organizational influence. The local organization benefits from instant name recognition through its affiliation with the national organization. It also benefits through resources, trainings, and access to new media tools because of the partnership. However, although the greatest influence is at the organizational level, this also trickles down to the individual level since these resources and opportunities can influence individual new media adoption and use.

#### Research Question Two

Research question two asked how new media influences Springfield NPOs' ability to influence their community. As previously mentioned in chapter two, in the context of this study "community" refers to people whom the NPO serves (i.e. the benefactors of the services provided by the organization), the people who support the



NPO (i.e. donors, volunteers, champions of the organization), and the people who live in the service area of the NPO (in this study, it is the people of Springfield and any surrounding areas that an NPO may serve).

In my line of questioning in this realm, I asked participants about how new media are used by their NPO to influence the NPOs community and constituents. Several themes emerged.

*Theme 1: New media allow innovative ways to reach and influence the community*

New media have transformed much of how society communicates in the U.S. This is certainly the case with the nonprofit professionals I spoke to. Several of the professionals explained how new media enable them to be innovative in how they reach out to the community. Direct observations allowed me to view this outreach first hand through each organization's website, Facebook page and Twitter account posts. Through my observations, I saw that most organizations use the online forums to share good news, announce upcoming events or activities, and to communicate with their followers. Kids First provides some examples of this content through their tweets such as, "Last week we decorated one of our buses and spread the word about CPCD at the Festival of Lights;" and "Adopt-A-Family Update: Over 230 Kids First families have been adopted for the holidays through Adopt-A-Family." During the interview process, NPO employees explained some additional examples of how new media enable them to reach out and influence their communities.

One example emerged during an interview with Lacy at the Springfield Zoo. She said cell phones are changing how they communicate with people who come to the zoo:

Lacy: Getting information and messages right to people's cell phones. It has its own set of rules and regs and you have to...there's some disclaimer. Meaning you always have to give the guest a way to stop. Email...you know, will people take the time to unsubscribe? Maybe, maybe not. But typically people don't take that time. But mobile marketing is a pretty, quote on quote, intrusive method, getting a text message and if they don't have, you know, standard text messaging rates apply. That always has to be in there, so it's a little bit different. But the beauty of it is, if they reach out to you, we are trying to uh, what's that word, get more numbers or build our database. We have for the first time, we reprint our zoo map every year and we put a little note on there...we have over twenty daily shows, keeper talks, and animal demonstrations. Signage all around the zoo, but the keepers were not seeing the numbers of people. We could have signage all around the zoo and they'd get three people at their animal show. Like how can we tell people about these awesome shows, which I'm sure they'd love to attend, but they just weren't aware of them.

Interviewer: Right.

Lacy: So, we just put this little thing on our map that says, for today's schedule text the code to zoo Monday, and right on your phone you get the schedule.

Interviewer: Oh, ok.

Lacy: And they can get one in the morning, one in the afternoon. And it's a little unknown because with the cost per text message, but if they reach out to me and want the animal shows, I can say hey, check out this web special at Grizzly Grill.

At the end of the day I could text them to say I hope you enjoyed your day at the zoo, would love to hear feedback. I mean it's just...you could go bananas with it.

Interviewer: That's really neat.

Lacy: It is. I mean it's great we're doing links with them, we're doing contests, there's a lot of ways beyond just a push message. There's a lot of ways for them to click here, go right on my site, I then can tell them about something else that's going on. So we're doing it, we're doing it I guess now that we have a database of several hundred, we're text messaging that database for some of our key events. We've never done that before. Like don't forget tickets you know...get them by five or prices go up at the door, etc. So, um I think it's just being. I think it's fairly progressive for a place like the zoo.

Through new media messaging on cell phones, the zoo has been able to influence how many people know about the various shows and events on their property. As a result, more people show up. They have experienced similar success using social media to recruit for zoo events. Tonya, also a zoo employee described one recent success story in particular:

Tonya: Well, we have one that was, I mean, very recent. We had a new um, we had, and you might have heard of this already from Lacy or Jill, um we had an event called Moonlight at the Zoo that we were actually not going to do anymore, because the participation has always been under 200. It was kind of an evening at the zoo with music and drinks. It was kind of all evening event, and we were like, you know we're not going to do it anymore for 200 people. It just wasn't

something that we could, we wanted to staff, um, to only reach that amount of people. So, um, we kind of said this was our last...oh sorry, someone just interrupted me.

Interviewer: No problem.

Tonya: Um, and so we've really pushed the event, and we did a lot of that on Facebook. We did tweeting...all said and done we had over 800 people come to the event and it was very successful. And a lot was all online, um, signups on our website. And that was pushed through Facebook, um, email blasts all those kinds of things. We did have some radio and we did have um some newspaper print. But the big push was social media and then also the email newsletter, I mean e-newsletter, those types of things. So the event really was a huge success and we really think we can grow it even bigger than it was. So that was an end result from using social media in a big way. It really turned out great and the weather held, and all that good stuff (Interview with Tonya, 4-5).

Additionally, they find Facebook has connected them with a new audience.

Social media is a new focus for our organization and how we can utilize it. And so, that's why I guess I focus on that. As we've done some surveys they tell us that about 50% of our over 7000 fans now are members and the rest are friends of members or what have you. So that's really exciting for us, because that's a new audience for us. We like to connect with as many people as we can because of our conservation and our mission, so the more people we can connect with the better. Um, makes our job easier (Interview with Tonya, 3).

Mark at Kids First has also used new media to reach the community. He is seeing a great impact in the way he works with news reporters:

Umm...I mean we kinda...we use social networking to communicate actually with um our media partners, so the newspapers in town, the TV stations, things like that. So, I mean that's really our way of pitching our stories. We don't really do it through email. We send em links, and little messages and...it's through Google, Facebook or Twitter. So I don't even use email at all to communicate with journalists. So what I do is via Twitter, what I'll do is I'll find the journalist we want to target, I'll send em a link, I'll post something on our website...maybe the press release, and I'll say hey, check this out, here's the link to our story if you want more information. I feel like there's much less clutter through Twitter than there is through email (Interview with Mark, 6).

When I asked if this is successful for him he said:

It turns into stories. And the journalists do say, wow that's cool...I really like that, when I talk to them after the story. And it keeps it short too, in 140 characters or less as opposed to a humongous press release in the email. I mean, you can keep it to two sentences and a link. They know right there if they're interested or not (Interview with Mark, 6).

Like these examples, over and over again in the interview process, participants explained these new and innovative ways in which new media are helping them to work smarter and be innovative in how they reach the community. They are seeing direct

action as a result of new media activity. People are acting upon messages they send out via new media channels, which supports the notion that they are making issues salient among their community (much like traditional media outlets do in traditional agenda setting theory). This impacts the work experience for individual NPO employees as well as the overall functions of the nonprofit organization.

*Theme 2: Most often new media in NPOs service donors and volunteers, not the people they directly serve*

Another theme that emerged from the interviews I conducted was that NPO professionals find new media helping them interact with key stakeholders, such as donors and volunteers. At Serving Seniors, tweet said, “Thanks to all of the staff and volunteers at Silver Key. We couldn’t complete our mission without your hard work!” At Building bridges, they said “Please consider supporting us in the [give](#) campaign! It’ll help us build more homes for low-income families.”

However, often, new media do not help them to connect with the populations they serve, much like the pattern that takes place with mainstream media in traditional agenda setting theory. At the local human services hotline at Caring Communities, this is the trend they observe. The hotline manager, Jane, says she does not see this changing, “Um, but even a lot of our clients themselves are not tech forward, so that I see that (phone hotline) will stay phone based for a long time” (Interview with Jane, 1). Jane and I discussed email communication that is used frequently by the hotline staff. When I asked who receives them she said:

Um I would say people not using the hotline, because the list we send out is the Caring Communities list. We don’t have lists of our clients, we don’t send to them

directly. So it's really um just kind of the partners that the organization already has, CEOs, CFOs, a lot of those (Interview with Jane, 4).

And she does not see this trend changing any time soon.

It's not something that we have talked about needing at all. I think because the phone hotline is still primarily phone focused. I mean if they're homeless, how are they going to email you. I mean you could go to the library. And even then you probably don't have an account that you're checking with any regularity (Interview with Jane, 4).

Amy at Serving Seniors has similar challenges with reaching those people that the organization serves.

Um, again our audiences are split. We have partners and people who are interested in Serving Seniors, uh just from a um community standpoint, and then we have our clients. Our clients are, um, uh...and our volunteers I should say. Our volunteers are probably the most active on our social media accounts. Um, because they are also, because they're volunteers, they are, you know, active individuals and interacting with Serving Seniors, whereas the rest of the clients are really just receiving a service and um going on because our audience ranges about 40 years, you know, 60 to 100. Um, really in terms of our clients we're, we're limited to a subset of uh our entire client audience. Um, I think really the focus for these efforts are primarily on partners and potential donors

(Interview with Amy, 4).

Serving Seniors and Caring Communities are just two of the organizations experiencing this trend. While new media help these organizations expand their communication to a mass audience, there still are several populations that are not online to receive these messages. In the realm of nonprofit work, often the people served are those less fortunate in society. In many cases, as with these two organizations, new media approaches are not practical ways of reaching clients. Instead, they find traditional communication such as mainstream media and newsletters to be most beneficial. Although NPOs may not reach the population they serve through new media channels, NPO professionals benefit through new media tools that help them reach donors and volunteers. They are able to disseminate messages that become salient with those who receive them, and as a result action (through volunteering, advocating and donating) result. New media channels help NPOs highlight key issues of organizational importance to the public. By recruiting volunteers, NPOs have more manpower to staff service events and projects. By recruiting donors and champions for the organization, NPOs can secure greater funds and social capital to support the needs of the clients they serve. New media enable several important connections between the organization and key stakeholders, but they do not enable the NPO to reach everyone in its community.

*Theme 3: New media help NPOs recruit volunteers, donors, and supporters*

While interviewing NPO professionals, I asked them about the direct results they have seen through new media use. I wanted to know about specific outcomes that have been attributed to new media use. The responses were impressive, as each organization



sees an impact of new media incorporation. At Building Bridges, Jori describes how Tweeting helped turn an inaugural event into a successful showing of volunteers and traditional media coverage of the event. She said:

I love, you know sharing more of our fun success stories, like our event...singles build. We, it was kind of our first attempt at a singles build day. It was right around Valentine's Day. And because it was our first go and because we weren't really sure what that was going to look like, we really didn't know if anybody was going to sign up. We didn't really promote it. And um, so I just had been Tweeting about it more to get people to sign up. I put the times on there and nobody had really contacted us about it. But the media showed up that day and did a story on it. And it was just so really, that was kind of neat. The singles came, and it was a great event (laughs). If we had known the media was coming we would have probably tried to make it a little more snazzy (Interview with Jori, 7).

Mark at Kids first also saw a direct impact of new media use. By getting connected with the community via social media, he feels it helped to bring his organization notoriety within Springfield.

Well, here's one good example, um so, you know like the Springfield Business Journal...every year they do the Springfield "best ofs" and we always do a humongous push...and mainly use email, word of mouth, phone calls...because we always want to get these awards. And we've gotten a few runner ups before, but it really wasn't that successful. And this was all before I came on board. And then when I came on board we started using the tools. And, so what we did...it's a

thing where the public votes on it. So it's really a community thing, what the community likes, what the community thinks is "best of in Springfield." And uh, so we used Facebook to say vote for us. We used Twitter, vote for us. We used our website right there on the front, vote for us. We used an e-news to all of our audiences and said, hey vote for us. And we actually ended up winning six categories, whereas before we hadn't even won any of the categories. So like, that's one thing where new media really influenced the community, because this is how they're listening. Because before you sent out an email, or you sent out a letter through the mail, or you just tell people on the phone. I don't think it encourages them to act, and it doesn't make it as easy. You know, telling someone a link on the telephone is a lot harder than making it to where they can just click on something. Like on Facebook you can see a little picture, and a little excerpt, so...you see the direct results. And the funny thing is that a lot of those awards...we didn't deserve to win. As long as you can market it with these different things...but without social networking I feel like you just can't reach as many people, so you can't influence the community as much. I really think that my use of it has made more people more accepting of it, and even users of it than before (Interview with Mark, 7).

Um like for a hike or a summer event, Facebook would be it this year which we haven't done in the past. I guess my goal with that was to um, get it out to all of our friends and have them invite their friends. We did have a lot of people that

were aware of it because of that that weren't before. So for me I think that was great (Interview with Jamie, 9).

Christian Compassion finds great benefits through their new media use. Mitch shared a few examples during our conversation:

It's all about awareness, and I tell them, we've got nearly 1000 people in about a year as fans, friends...and that would be like my pulling together a group of 1000 people every day and giving them a staff briefing, or a briefing, saying let me tell you what's going on today (Interview with Mitch, p. 4).

The organization's president participated in a bicycling across America event to raise awareness for the organization. A unique Facebook page was created just for this event, which tapped the organization into a whole new arena of followers:

Particularly with the cycling event, that was true. I mean we really... there's a whole constituency that I didn't even know about and what pushes their buttons and what they'll respond to. The bicycling community really got on board and was very interested in what was going on. There was an impact...they themselves (Facebook and web followers) are getting involved. Here's an example. Betsy my assistant, she mentioned to me that she had a stationary bike that she likes to get on the bike, and she'd like to get on the bike and pretend that she were traveling, even though it's stationary. It's like mapping out, if I'm doing this many miles on the stationary bike, then I can map it out geographically. So I said, write about it. So she has her own blog for us that's about going the distance. And she writes

about it as though she's actually there. So she'll talk about the townsfolk, and the special foods, and the sites or she'll go online and pull up pictures that represent the various areas that she has seen. And, it's probably one of our most popular blogs, because it's about fitness, people love fitness, and they love that she's getting fit in the process of sharing. And it turns out that she's a superb writer. And you know, it's interesting, because people are cheering her on. You know, um, and respond to that (Mitch, 5-6).

These examples highlight the themes that emerged in the interviews I had with all of the NPO professionals I spoke to. Those who regularly use new media say that it is helping them to reach people faster and more frequently to have a direct impact on things such as financial contributions and volunteerism. Ultimately, this helps the individual professionals and the overall nonprofit organizations have greater success in achieving their mission and helping the populations they serve.

*Theme 4: NPO professionals see that new media allow their organizations to serve a news producing function in society.*

Agenda setting theory is the guide for question two. Traditional agenda setting theory deals with traditional mainstream media and its producers and issue salience among the audience. This theory helped inspire my line of questioning to see if perhaps new media enable NPOs to also serve a news producing function in society. We can see already in the previous theme that new media have enabled the professionals with whom I spoke to see direct results through using these resources. I also had to ask these professionals if they believe that new media enable them to have a news producing

function in their community. The resounding response was yes. Here are a few of the responses from participants when asked this question:

I do. I absolutely do. Um, if you go to um, Cycling for Hope or if you look at CEO's Facebook, he does a daily update on what he's doing as he rides across America to raise awareness of poverty. And his video clips are about three minutes every other day and there's a daily update on where they're riding and where they're staying. And they're staying in soup kitchens sleeping on the floor. Uh, but those updates and that personal touch definitely, definitely are beneficial (Interview with Seth, 7).

As in, yeah, things happening within their organization that you know, the public is going to pick up on and talk about, just like you would think of any other news source of any kind. Are NPs now able to kind of join that club since they have more outlets perhaps through new media channels? (Interview with Tonya, 4).

Yes. I think it allows, we're um, taking advantage of that, but um, I know we're not taking....well...taking...I think that there could be a good and a bad side of that certainly. But I think from the same, because LeBron James is making his news on the new media. I think that's where um, that's where news is. That's where people are getting their information and are getting their news. I think there's a huge opportunity for our um, for the nonprofit sector to be able to create news. And I mentioned that I follow the Springfield Health Foundation. So their a NP foundation, and I think an organization like that is using it very effectively.

They're blogging, they're sending out Tweets, they're on Facebook. They're on all those things. And it's about health policy and the state, but they're driving a lot of health policy in the state. They are certainly creating their own news based on um, based on new media. So yeah, there's a lot of explanation for a yes, but absolutely (Interview with Anthony, 6).

And Norma at Kids First says that because of new media and its ability to let the organization tell its own story, she really is quite comfortable with her organization serving a news producing function:

I'm kind of rapidly getting to the point where, I don't care if the media covers us or not. You know, we, we, we have control over our own destiny the more of this that we do. Um, and the better we get at it, um, you know, we'll, we'll create our own stories and get our own stories out. You have to have access to savvy people.

Um, and the technology...the infrastructure to do that (Interview with Norma, 4).

In viewing the Kids First uses of Facebook, Twitter and its website, one can see newsworthy posts such as this call to action, "Calling all current and former Kids First Parents! Right now, Congress and the White House are finalizing funding for our program for for Fiscal Year 2011. As federal budgets are extremely tight yet the pressures on parents and communities are growing, we need ensure we can continue serving the children and families currently in the program. Please join parents from across the country and sign a petition telling Congress to maintain funding."

And like Norma, NPO professionals feel that new media do allow them to produce news and tell their stories in a way they believe it should be told. They are able to control their own stories and serve as the “gatekeepers” of their own news. New media are giving NPOs a new power to produce mass messages that previously was not possible. This observation has a significant implication for the nonprofit organization. It forces one to reconsider how we define news producers and evaluate whether NPOs should be viewed as organizations with a news-producing function.

In conclusion, this chapter highlights the key results of this study. Through a summary of cases and cross-case analysis, this chapter explains the ways in which, based on the interview and observations conducted, adoption of new media are impacting the work experience of employees within NPOs as well as the influence the NPO has on its community. The next chapter provides a discussion of key findings and contributions of this study.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### DISCUSSION

This chapter contains the key findings, conclusions and contributions of the study. Before beginning the discussion, it should be noted that at the time of writing this dissertation, the United States is in a unique cultural moment. The country has just experienced the greatest economic recession since the Great Depression. Many businesses, both for-profit and nonprofit alike, have cut staff and some have even shut their doors. However, despite the decline in economic activity nationwide, new media adoption has taken off at an incredible pace during this same cultural moment. The overall purpose of this research is to better understand how new media are adopted and used by nonprofit professionals in the city of Springfield (the pseudonym for a large Western U.S. city). The main objective of this study was to learn more about the experiences of the nonprofit organization and its employees and how new media are taking shape within each realm. To guide this inquiry, first a line of questioning was inspired by the diffusion of innovations theory (Rogers, 1962). In this light, the goal was to understand how new media are introduced and incorporated into their work. The second line of questioning was guided by agenda setting theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). In this light, the goal was to understand how nonprofit employees use new media to achieve specific outcomes and goals to help with their NPO's ability to influence their community. A qualitative study design was used to get rich, thick descriptions of the work experiences taking place within each of the individuals with whom I spoke. A case



study approach was used in order to get a wide variety of perspectives by looking into multiple cases across seven different organizations in the city of Springfield.

Over the course of the interviews, several themes emerged that became repetitive across organizations. I first will summarize the key themes that emerged based on the first research question, which was guided by diffusion of innovations theory. RQ1 asked: How are new media introduced and incorporated into the work of NPOs and their employees in Springfield?

The first theme that emerged from RQ1 is that individual employees are influential in new media adoption in the workplace. At each NPO I visited, there were one or two key people who helped to keep the organization on pace with new media developments and incorporation at the organization. In most cases, this individual was a young employee in his or her 20s or 30s. These employees are the ones to get the organizations linked in to social media sites such as Facebook and Twitter. They also help refresh the look and functionality of the organizations' home pages, find useful databases, and incorporate software that is helpful to achieving the NPOs' missions. In diffusion of innovations theory, these individuals are the innovators (the first people to adopt an innovation) or the early adopters (people who stay on the cutting edge of technology and are the second group to adopt an innovation) (Rogers, 1995). The innovator/early adopter employees help move the adoption process along within the NPO, bringing their colleagues into the early majority (people who let more time pass before adopting the innovation) or late majority (people who are more skeptical about adopting the innovation) adoption categories. At times, the innovator/early adopter employees find themselves battling the resistance of other colleagues who fall in the late

majority category. It seems that this could be because they are junior staffers making historic changes within the workplace and how work is done. The changes that come with new media can open the organization up to the public in new ways, and therefore may cause some uncertainty in the adoption process.

While each NPO in this study had a key person or two who have the greatest influence in NPO adoption, some organizations were more strategic in selecting this individual. In the organizations that were strategic about hiring someone specifically to focus on new media activity, they seemed to enjoy greater new media activity with the community, and as a result enjoyed more success in the outcomes that the activity generated. The organizations that were more haphazard in their approach to new media adoption tend to experience more frustration and misguided adoption experiences. They appear to take longer to adopt new media, likely because no one on staff can spend too much time focusing on this aspect of his or her job. Additionally, they appear to have very minimal, basic new media implemented, therefore they do not experience the benefits of focused, highly active new media activity.

The second theme that emerged from question one was that NPOs experience some uncertainty with new media adoption. Many of the NPO professionals I spoke to said that they have moved past the phase of uncertainty and now embrace new media. However, they all mentioned that it took some time to trust using them. The time involved in the adoption process puts them into the diffusion of innovations late majority adoption category. They needed more time to observe and evaluate the innovation to determine whether or not it is worth adopting. When they finally feel confident in the innovation, they adopt it (Rogers, 1995). There are some professionals I spoke to who

work in an environment where people are still highly skeptical of new media use, and it is still strictly regulated and monitored. In this type of environment, employees are very frustrated and find that it keeps them from being able to accomplish their work in the most efficient and practical means possible.

The third theme that emerged was that new media adoption is increasing the pace of work among the NPO professionals with whom I spoke. Things that could take a week to finish just a few years ago, now are expected to be turned around in as little as a day. Not only are things moving at a faster pace, but they also are moving around the clock. Individuals described how they now use mobile devices to stay connected to work even when they get up in the middle of the night at home. There is really no place where today's NPO professional can go where he or she is completely disconnected from work.

The fourth that emerged is that new media adoption is helping NPOs, which often work on tight budgets, to operate more efficiently. By cutting down on printing and mailing costs of paper-based messages such as newsletters and invitations, email and social networking allow the NPOs to be just as effective in recruiting for events, fundraising, or membership appeals at just a fraction of the cost. New media also help NPOs to be more efficient in keeping track of key activities within their organizations. Sophisticated databases allow the organizations to keep highly detailed profiles on donors and people they serve. Information is retrievable more quickly and more accurately than when it was stored in hard copy files. There are a few exceptions in which a more costly approach is preferred over the use of new media. For formal event invitations and for reaching out to people who do not use e-mail, traditional approaches to communication

through paper still are used. Otherwise, utilizing new media is preferred and used to increase efficiencies within the NPO.

The fifth and final theme that emerged from question one is that new media adoption in local NPOs with a national affiliation is influenced by its national umbrella organization. Half of the organizations I visited were local NPOs that are part of a larger national nonprofit. Repeatedly, professionals in these organizations described how the national organization influences their local new media adoption. These individuals described how being an affiliate organization gives them tremendous access to tools and resources. Online articles, discussion forums, and trainings are just some of the offerings they find. Since many NPOs cannot afford to send staff to national conferences, these web-based resources are helpful tools for instruction about NPO topics and how to incorporate new media.

I now will summarize the themes that resulted as a response to RQ2 which asked: How do Springfield NPOs and their employees use new media to achieve specific outcomes and goals to help with their NPO's ability to influence their community? Agenda setting guided the line of questioning for RQ2.

The first theme to emerge from discussions with NPO professionals is that new media allow innovative ways to reach and influence the community. Through my discussions, NPO professionals highlighted some very innovative techniques used to reach their community. The most frequent technique that came up in discussions is the use of Facebook to share news and recruit for volunteer opportunities and events. Text messaging and Tweeting were two additional techniques through which NPO staff members reach their constituents to inform them of activities taking place within their

organization. One organization also indicated that they are working to establish text donation capabilities in the near future. They find that Facebook, text messaging and Tweets allow for quick connection with their community and as a result, they get quick responses. These new media provide innovative channels through which NPOs can disseminate messages and make their issues salient within their communities, a process similar to that of the media and its audience in traditional agenda setting theory.

The second theme that emerged from RQ2 is that new media in NPOs often service the donors and volunteers, but not the portion of the community they serve. New media are a tremendous tool in recruiting volunteers, key stakeholders, and donor dollars. People who seek NPOs for these types of activities are generally accessible online. Those who live in poverty, are homeless, or are elderly are less accessible online according to the NPO professionals with whom I spoke. At times, using traditional media, newsletters, and word of mouth when in contact with such individuals is a better means to connect with people who are not regularly online using social media and checking websites and email.

The third theme that emerged from RQ2 is that new media provides direct results for NPOs such as volunteer activity, event participants, donor dollars, and community support. Some professionals also see direct results with mainstream media, as now they feel they can communicate better with traditional media staff to promote stories.

The final theme that emerged from RQ2 is that most of the NPO professionals I spoke to believe that new media enable NPOs to serve a news producing function in society. The NPO professionals largely believe that new media allow them to tell their organization's story directly to a mass audience rather than having it filtered through

traditional media outlets. They feel that they have a more direct communication channel with the community by using new media.

To understand how these themes apply to and influence mass communication scholarship, the next section will evaluate the study's strengths, overall theoretical and practical implications, and direction for future research.

#### Strengths, Implications, Direction for Future Research Study's Implications

##### *Strengths of the study*

This study used the case study approach to gain a deep understanding into the situation of new media use at each nonprofit. Often with case studies, only one or sometimes two cases are used. A strength of this study is the number of cases that were evaluated in order to observe patterns and themes that emerged from the experiences of NPO professionals using new media. By using seven cases for my research, I was able to identify recurring trends taking place among nonprofit work in both independent and nationally-affiliated local nonprofits. Another strength of the study is the use of multiple methods of data collection. Not only were in-depth interviews conducted, but also direct observation of the new media content produced by each NPO was observed. This allowed me to verify if what is produced matched with what was described during the interview process. To further ensure accuracy of the findings of this study, four qualitative research verification techniques were also adopted to ensure the accuracy of my interpretations of the data.

##### *Theoretical Implications*

This study provides in-depth insight into the working lives of nonprofit professionals. This research gives a close view into how new media are adopted by NPOs

and how the adoption of these enables the organizations (and the individuals who work within in them) to influence and interact with their communities. The implications of this understanding are both theoretical and practical in nature. Two theories guided this research, diffusion of innovations and agenda setting. The application of these theories was somewhat unconventional because they were applied to the new media functions of nonprofit organizations rather than traditional media, thus this study provide expanded ways in which the theories can be considered and applied.

### *Diffusion of Innovations*

The application of diffusion of innovations theory helped to guide questioning of the NPO professionals with whom I spoke. The application of the theory was very traditional using the main tenants of the theory to guide my research. However, unlike most mass communication studies that use diffusion theory applied to mainstream media products, this study took a different approach by applying the theory to new media uses by nonprofits.

Using diffusion of innovations to examine new media uses in NPOs gives new insight about new media and their diffusion elements (the innovation, communication channels, time, and the social system). New media technologies (the innovation) accompany specific communication that takes place to move the adoption process along within the nonprofit organization. This takes place both among individual NPO employees and NPO organizations (communication channels). In the cases presented in this study, we see that usually one or two individuals begin the communication that leads to a trend of new media adoption. Additionally, NPOs affiliated with a national

organization tend to benefit from this affiliation and learn about new media adoption and practices through this connection.

Time is the third element of diffusion, and it is concerned with the period of time between innovation through either adoption or rejection. We see in this study that organizations that made strategic decisions to implement new media were successful in implementing engaging new media activity in a timely manner. This is the result of staff time dedicated directly to the goal of new media implementation. Those organizations that did not hire or appoint a specific employee to implement new media as a significant job duty often took longer to implement new media activity (and the activity produced was less comprehensive and engaging for the public). These participants in the study had less new media activity that they were able to describe during interviews, since they still are working on developing their new media engagement.

The social system is the final element of the diffusion process. Social systems are either heterophilious (those that embrace change and new ideas) or homophilous (those that are less innovative and stay locked within norms) (Rogers, 1995). This study shows that the heterophilious NPOs embrace new media implementation within the organization. They actively seek ways in which they can enhance and grow new media messaging to their communities. As a result, they enjoy greater interaction with their communities, greater publicity for their organizations, and overall greater satisfaction with the impact that new media use have on their ability to recruit volunteers, raise donor dollars and spread key messages about their mission. By contrast, homophilious NPOs inflict strict new media controls that breed frustration and distrust among colleagues. Information does not flow with ease to the community from these NPOs. They do not



promote a highly active new media agenda and as a result to not enjoy the benefits that accompany active new media use in the heterophilous organization.

Diffusion theory helps to explain the new media adoption process taking place within NPOs and how this process effects the organization, its employees, and its effectiveness. In the NPOs involved in this study, we see that the rate of diffusion has a correlation with successful implementation of new media. Those organizations that have adopted new media more quickly and with more sophistication enjoy greater benefits from the new media use (more volunteers, greater fundraising activity, etc.). For example, at the Springfield Zoo, they have hired a specific employee to focus on NPO activity. They use the most cutting edge technology, such as texting daily info about the zoo and text message fundraisers. As a result, see greater activity within zoo exhibits, at events, and in dollars raised. We see that the NPOs that are slower to adopt new media have the opposite experience. They experience fewer of the NPO benefits that new media can provide. For example, at Spirit, Mind, Body, employees have to filter through a central office to post on Facebook. This defeats the immediacy that Facebook provides to followers of the organization. It can take hours or even a day or two to get a message “cleared” for posting by the central office. Employees at this NPO explained that this is highly inefficient and ineffective for the work they are trying to accomplish. The stories told by participants in this study indicate that NPO that adopt new media earlier and more liberally tend to experience the greatest satisfaction and benefits from their new media use. Now theoretical implications to diffusion theory have been discussed, the next section will explain the current study’s implications on agenda setting theory.

### *Agenda Setting*

The application of agenda setting theory as a guide for new media use by NPOs is unlike traditional agenda setting studies. Most studies in the agenda setting tradition focus on traditional media products such as TV, radio, newspapers, etc. Agenda setting's application to new media use by NPOs resulted in a very fitting approach for not only this study, but also for those to come in the future. The NPO professionals with whom I spoke confirmed that they believe new media enable them to produce news for their community. They provided several examples of times when the messages they disseminated to their audience resulted in action and dialogue. Since NPOs appear to have the capability to produce original news, agenda setting serves as the appropriate guide to determine if the news product produced by NPOs via new media channels enables the NPOs to make particular issues salient within the minds of the audience (their community).

As NPOs serve a news producing function, they are enabled to circumvent the traditional gatekeeping of mainstream news outlets. NPOs can get their message directly to the audience without having the traditional media filter. While this is seen as a tremendous benefit to NPOs, one must consider the implications this could have on society. First, since NPOs produce news through new media channels, they only are reaching an invested audience rather than the broader public that mainstream media reaches (unless, of course, a media follower or reporter picks up the story for mainstream media). Furthermore, one must also challenge that perhaps there are important stories that investigative journalists would tell that the NPO itself would not (such as a scandal or misuse of funds). Therefore, while it is a helpful tool for NPOs to produce newsworthy content to its invested followers, there still is a broad public that misses out on these

messages. Traditional media still hold their place in society in serving as a watch dog for all organizations (for-profit, nonprofit, and governmental) by conducting quality journalism and sharing it with the broader public audience, not just an invested NPO audience.

Because NPOs are able to produce news content and set an agenda for the audience that follow them, a reconsideration of traditional agenda setting application must be considered by expanding its uses into studying *all* mass media producers, not just traditional mainstream media. By studying all mass media producers from the agenda setting perspective, organizations such as the NPOs in this study would be viewable as news producers in society. I believe the findings of this study provide evidence of new ways for agenda setting application that have considerable implications for mass communication scholars of agenda setting theory.

#### *Practical Implications*

This study's findings provide numerous practical implications for nonprofit professionals and professionals in the mass communications disciplines. Probably the most helpful result is that this study provides detailed descriptions of what characterizes successful adoption and uses of new media within NPOs and how such practices assist the organizations with their ability to reach out to their community. The most frequent ways in which NPOs are doing this is through channels such as Facebook, Twitter, and organizational websites. They use these channels to share information about events, fundraising efforts, issues of importance, and volunteer opportunities. This knowledge can help other NPOs who are just starting to adopt new media or wish to improve or enhance their current new media offerings. The study also provides detailed descriptions

of how the adoption of new media in some organizations can be detrimental to productivity within NPOs. NPO employees described the impact of highly scrutinized new media use, the rapid pace of work that accompanies new media adoption, and the increased demands that come with being accessible around the clock via new media communications. This study also provides insight into a new trend in mass communication. Nonprofits and the professionals working in them now believe they have the power and ability to produce news via new media outlets. They are creating and producing news content relevant to their organizations' stakeholders and are using this content to produce direct results in funds raised, volunteers present, and attendees at events. Outlets such as websites, Facebook, and Twitter are enabling the NPO professionals to have an impact on their community in ways that were previously impossible.

Based on the data presented in this study, there are a few practical recommendations that can help NPOs to adopt and implement new media most effectively. First, hire or appoint a staff person who is dedicated to the production and oversight of new media content. This person should be someone who is an early adopter of new media and knows which tools are most helpful to the organization. Generally this person will have experience both in mass communication and technology. This person should have new media as a major part of their job duties in order to make new media content most effective and beneficial for the organization. Second, do not step into new media adoption haphazardly. The NPOs that are simply trying out new media tools without strategically aligning new media efforts with organizational goals are those that do not have as much success and do not see as many direct results from new media

activity. Lastly, use new media to achieve strategic goals in terms of fundraising, volunteer activity, and activism. By taking advantage of the news producing function of new media, several of the NPO professionals in this study have seen success in terms of more dollars raised, increased volunteer activity, and greater awareness of their organization's mission.

#### *Directions for future research*

The goal of this study is not to make generalizable claims, but rather to understand the work experiences of NPO professionals using new media. However, the study provides a unique springboard for future research both in the qualitative and quantitative realms. Over the course of the interviews I conducted, many people indicated that while they find new media beneficial and can see direct results, they still wish there were a way to measure the impact that such media exposure has on the audience. A traditional agenda setting study using controlled, quantitative methods could help to isolate and identify the direct impact that NPO mass messages have on the audience that receives these messages via new media. Such a study could evaluate issue salience among the audience based on the messages disseminated by the NPO through new media channels. Another approach that would extend the current study is to repeat the study using the NPO community as the interview subjects. This would give insight into how the audience is actually using the new media products. Such information could help NPOs to produce the most useful new media content for its users. A third approach for further research would be to conduct a similar study using for-profit or governmental organizations as the focus. By shifting the focus to organizations that operate differently

from NPOs, one could compare and contrast the extent to which this study's findings apply within different organizational contexts.

### *Conclusion*

New media is a pervasive and dominant force within today's nonprofit sector. The adoption of new media by NPOs has caused changes in the work experience of NPO workers as well as the working activities of the NPO. New media adoption in the NPO means working at a faster pace, disseminating messages to key community audiences, and using these tools to communicate to the public and traditional news producers in order to promote the NPO's mission. New media adoption also enables NPOs to serve a news producing function in society, a function that provides direct results for the organizations (especially in the key areas of volunteer recruitment, dollars donated, and organization supporters). Therefore we must begin to look at key messaging from these organizations in ways that we would examine messages produced by traditional newsmakers. This study begins that process by application and analysis of new media uses in nonprofits with the guide of diffusion of innovations and agenda setting theory. The findings of this study show that the NPOs involved in this study see themselves serving a news producing function in society because of the new media tools they have adopted. These tools enable the NPOs and their employees to play an agenda setting role within their communities, similar to traditional media outlets. I believe that mass communication scholars should build upon these findings and continue to challenge themselves in exploring the new media frontier and the ways in which traditional mass communication theories shed light on the new trends taking place in how we communicate to the masses. To do this, future studies should continue expanded analysis

of new media adoption practices and how new media communication enables individuals and organizations to set the agenda in society.

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## APPENDIX A

### Email Recruitment Script

Dear (person's name here),

My name is Lauren Brengarth and I'm a Ph.D. student at the University of Missouri Department of Communication. I currently live in Colorado Springs, and I am conducting my dissertation research in our community.

I am hoping for the chance to interview you for my research. The study's purpose is to understand how of new media play a role in the work experience of nonprofit professionals and the nonprofit's ability to interact with its community?

If you are interested in participating, we can set up a time to get together at a time and place of your convenience. It will take approximately 30 minutes from the time you arrive to the time you leave.

Thank you in advance for your consideration! I look forward to hearing from you!

Sincerely,  
Lauren Bacon Brengarth

## APPENDIX B

### Interview Protocol

#### Interview Questions

1. How do you use new media in your job (i.e. those that are digital such as web-based technology, social networking, handheld devices, etc.)?
2. What types of new media do you use?
3. How did new technology become incorporated into the way you do your work?
  - a. How have they changed the way you do your work, if at all?
4. Tell me about a time when you remember using a new technology at work for the first time.
  - a. How did it change things?
5. Can you share an example of when you or your organization tried to introduce a new technology and it failed to take off or work?
6. What role do you see yourself having in new media adoption within your organization?
  - a. Can you provide some examples of when you have influenced new media adoption /use in your organization?
7. What role does your organization have within the nonprofit community and other organizations' adoption of new media?
  - a. Please provide some examples or steps that are involved in this process.
8. How are new media used to interact with your organizations community?
9. What impact do you think your organization's use of new media has had on the community?
10. Do you feel that your own use of new media has impacted your ability to influence your community? If so, how?
11. How do you use new media to achieve a specific outcome or goal within your community?
12. Do you think that new media allows your organization to have a news producing function?

## APPENDIX C

### Informed Consent Document

Project Title: How does the use of new media play a role in the work experience of nonprofit professionals and the nonprofit's ability to interact with its community?

Researcher: Lauren Brengarth, Ph.D. student in the MU Department of Communication

Purpose: I am interested in how new media play a role in your work and your organization's ability to interact with its community. The interview should take between ½ to 1 hour.

Procedure: After you sign this form, I will then ask you questions about new media in relation to your job. I will use your responses to help understand your perspective.

Voluntary: Your participation is voluntary. You may quit at any time and you may refuse to answer any question.

Risk: There is minimal risk involved with the study. There is no more risk than you would experience in your daily interactions.

Confidential: Neither your identity or the identity of your place of employment will be revealed in either transcripts, written documents, or verbal presentations of the data. The following steps will be taken to protect your identity and confidentiality:

1. Documents and transcripts will be stored in a secured location.
2. This consent form will be separated from the data.
3. Identifying information will be deleted from the transcripts of the group discussion.
4. Participants will never be mentioned by name or specialty.
5. You can refuse to answer any questions asked.

Contact: If you have any questions, feel free to contact the primary investigator, Lauren Brengarth at BrengarthL@missouri.edu or 573-268-7141 or the supervising faculty, Dr. Lissa Behm-Morawitz at behmorawitze@missouri.edu or 573-882-9786.

Questions: If you have any questions about your rights, contact: Campus IRB, 483 McReynolds Hall, Columbia MO 65211, (573) 882-9585

Signing this consent indicates that you understand and agree to the conditions mentioned above.

---

Signature

Date

## APPENDIX D

### Summary of Key Findings

The purpose of this study is to understand how new media are adopted and used by nonprofit professionals in Springfield. The study is guided by diffusion of innovations theory (Rogers, 1962) and agenda setting theory (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Using interviews, case studies of seven organizations provided several insights that lead to overarching themes for the study.

RQ1: How are new media introduced and incorporated into the work of NPOs and their employees in Springfield?

1. Individual employees are influential in new media adoption in the workplace. Often one or two people, in their 20s or 30s oversee new media functions. Some organizations were more strategic hiring this individual and as a result enjoyed more success in the outcomes that the activity generated than those who did not.
2. NPOs experience some uncertainty with new media adoption. Many NPO professionals said they have moved past the phase of uncertainty and now embrace new media. However, they all mentioned that it took some time to trust using them. Other professionals I spoke to work where people are still highly skeptical of new media use, and it is still strictly regulated and monitored.
3. New media adoption is increasing the pace of work among the NPO professionals with whom I spoke. Things that could take a week to finish just a few years ago, now are expected to be turned around in as little as a day. Not only are things moving at a faster pace, but they also are moving around the clock.
4. New media adoption is helping NPOs, which often work on tight budgets, to operate more efficiently. By cutting down on printing and mailing costs of paper-based messages such as newsletters and invitations, email and social networking allow the NPOs to be just as effective in recruiting for events, fundraising, or membership appeals at just a fraction of the cost. New media also help NPOs to be more efficient in keeping track of key activities within their organizations.
5. New media adoption in local NPOs with a national affiliation is influenced by its national umbrella organization. Being an affiliate organization gives them tremendous access to tools and resources.

RQ2: How do Springfield NPOs and their employees use new media to achieve specific outcomes and goals to help with their NPO's ability to influence their community?

1. New media allow innovative ways to reach and influence the community. The most frequent technique that came up in discussions is the use of Facebook to share news and recruit for volunteer opportunities and events. Text messaging and Tweeting were two additional techniques through which NPO staff members reach their constituents to inform them of activities taking place within their organization.
2. New media in NPOs often service the donors and volunteers, but not the portion of the community they serve. New media are a tremendous tool in recruiting volunteers, key stakeholders, and donor dollars, but people who live in poverty, are homeless, or are elderly are less accessible online. At times, using traditional media, newsletters, and word of mouth when in contact with such individuals is a better means to connect with people who are not regularly online using social media and checking websites and email.

3. New media provide direct results for NPOs through volunteer activity, event participants, donor dollars, and community support. Some professionals also see results with traditional media new media help them promote stories with these outlets.
4. Most of the NPO professionals I spoke to believe that new media enable NPOs to serve a news producing function in society. The NPO professionals largely believe that new media allow them to tell their organization's story directly to a mass audience rather than having it filtered through traditional media outlets.



## VITA

Lauren E. Bacon Brengarth was born in Sandusky, Ohio, and was raised in Huron Ohio. She graduated from Huron High School in 1999 and then attended the University of Missouri-Columbia to study broadcast news. During her undergraduate career she also served as an active television reporter, producer, and anchor for KOMU-TV8, the NBC affiliate in Columbia, Missouri. She received her Bachelor's in Journalism in 2003 from the MU School of Journalism and her Master's of Arts in Journalism (with a media management focus) in 2004. While pursuing the MA degree, Lauren continued on-air work at KOMU and began working at the Mizzou Alumni Association (MAA) overseeing the Homecoming program and its Midwest U.S. Alumni chapters. She worked at the MAA until 2005 and then became a major gifts officer for the Missouri College of Veterinary Medicine until 2007 when she began her Ph.D. program in the MU Department of Communication.

Lauren's doctoral studies focused on topics of mass communication, new media, public affairs, and journalism. While working on her Ph.D. she taught several courses including Studio Production, Field Production, and Media in Society and she served as a research assistant to Dr. Elizabeth (Lissa) Behm-Morawitz. While completing her doctorate, Lauren also worked part time as the Research and Marketing Director for Word Marketing/Horizon Research from 2007-2008. Lauren moved to Colorado Springs in 2009 and she currently is an Assistant Professor at the Colorado State University-Pueblo Department of Mass Communications and Center for New Media. She graduated with her Ph.D in Communication from the University of Missouri in May, 2011.